

Narratives of Post-Conflict: Representation of Violence in Colombian Contemporary Cinema

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ABSTRACT

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This research project is centered on the tight relationship between the articulation of social imaginaries and the representation of the Colombian internal conflict in national cinema. The Colombian peace-process situation currently encompasses over 50 years of conflict and a continuous search – through different manifestations of memory and intense use of media – of a new cultural identity. The narrative mechanisms of representation adopted by mass media are a fundamental part of the reconciliation process as they are a crucial form of collective memory and, simultaneously, the exercise of power that takes the shape of an official cultural memory. The objective of this study is to identify the narrative structures and conjunctions through which violence is assimilated, (re)presented, filed and inserted in the field of cultural memory by Colombian mass media after the signing of the peace treaty in 2016.

Key words: Post-Conflict, Narratives, Memory, Violence, Colombian Cinema, Representation.

DEDICATION

For all of those who live at the margins of reason, at the borders of language and knowledge,
by the *guakayó* (river of graves).

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence is a fundamental part of the Colombian imaginary. Both at home and abroad, conflict has for long been regarded as one of the main identifiers of the nation. According to Juana Suárez, violence is the dominant discursive formation of Colombian cinema (and art in general), which makes impossible the idea to “detach the discussion of any topic regarding national cinema from the issue of violence” (Suárez, 2009: 11). Moreover, the fact that such rhetoric of violence through which we narrate our stories (Barbero and Pécault in Martínez, 2012) is unstable and mobile reinforces the belief that violence is a natural element of the Colombian reality while implying a permanent state of crisis. However, by acknowledging that more than a cause in itself, violence is a symptom of a large social process, one realizes the systemic nature of violence. Indeed, as Geoffrey Kantaris argues, “violence is as much an *effect of representation* as it is a *system of representation* itself” (2008: 456) that permeates all national spatial, temporal and conceptual frameworks.

Despite numerous attempts at classifying all forms of violence and/or relating its origins to specific events in the history of Colombia, it becomes ever more difficult to define the roots of the Colombian conflict as its longevity and complexity remain transversal to all of social, political and cultural articulations. Moreover, the perception of a defined collective past is informed and configured by the socio-political dynamics of the present. The evolution of any perception-memory of conflict in the country develops in accordance to the changing trends of the contemporary era. As violence continuously evolves into diversified and new forms, a trail of progression is lost. Without a firm position from which to deploy projections and guides for historical development, it represents a challenge for the Colombian society to interpret and narrate the origins, participants and future of the larger part of the events that make up the long-established understandings of conflict. We now become concerned with the way in which concepts related to the Colombian conflict come to be defined by meanings that are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes. Here, national cinema becomes a critical tool of analysis inasmuch as it articulates the most popular images and narratives of violence through the audiovisual mediation of sense and affect. Indeed, identifying the intersections from which violence is portrayed and sustained in popular narratives allows us to formulate a better understanding on the current conception of post-conflict in Colombia. First, a short contextualization of how the conflict has been experienced by the Colombian society, as well as the social and historical circumstances from which conflict derives and continues to develop, is in order.

1.1. Predominant narratives of violence and the conceptualization of the Colombian conflict.

There exists a large debate over the terminology with which to describe the confrontations between the Colombian State, the guerrilla and the paramilitary groups. “Internal war”, “political violence”, “internal terrorism” and “armed conflict” are some of the terms that are used to designate the almost six decades-old conflict. The quarrel of naming, a site of dispute in itself, has gaslighted the plurality and difference of the belief systems that fuel the crash between all parties and issues involved, making it even more difficult to achieve a resolution. Yeny Serrano points out to how: “*il importe de s’interroger sur les conditions dans lesquelles le conflit est nommé et par qui*” (Serrano, 2010: 221). Further, “[l]a façon de désigner la situation de violence sociopolitique en Colombie engendre des enjeux, juridiques et de légitimité considérables” (67). Consequently, Serrano also recognizes a ‘*guerre langagière*’, which highlights the problematic of establishing a specific designation of the conflict encouraged by the underlying cultural and political interests, and the ways through

which social actors challenge those official nominations and procedures. For the purpose of this text, I will use the term “armed conflict”, which, as stated by Eduardo Pizarro (2017), seems to be the intermediate point between the revolutionary narratives of the guerrilla groups and the negationist discourse of the establishment (State).¹

The understanding of violence in Colombia cannot and should not be restricted to the confrontation between armed groups or the collateral effects of illicit drugs-based economy. According to Jorge Iván Marín Taborda (2005), the political systems set in place after colonization relegated and restricted power in the hands of the conservative wealthy, the catholic elite and the land owners; which led to some of those excluded from the power structure and deprived of any form of political participation to conform and organize the Liberal Party. Indeed, violence whipped the Colombian society well before drug cultivation, processing and trafficking became the widely spread, number one factor behind the origins of the conflict in the country. In fact, historian Marco Palacios (Et, Al. 2002) analyzes the consistencies present along the multitude and complexity of the forms of violence in Colombia and identifies three historical phases. The first phase refers to the bipartisan confrontation that finds its origins in the assassination of the liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and which triggered El Bogotazo.² Occurring between 1946 and 1964, this conflict was deeply entrenched in private interests and implicated a civil conflict fueled by ideas of anarchy and the fight for personal revenge. The second phase is situated between 1961 and 1989 during the cold war years and the recent Cuban revolution, and refers to the conformation of guerrilla groups and *l'esprit du temps* of creating new social orders through warfare. Lastly, the third phase, which began in the 80s until the present, is heavily outlined by the insertion of drug trafficking in the Colombian society, lawlessness, mafia and cartel wars, corruption, societal changes of values, among others. Further, the conflict in Colombia is not conceived as an exceptional form of struggle, as was perceived by the conventions of Marxism-Leninism, but as a form of permanent action and with total autonomy from the political conjunction, both national and international. This “militarization of politics” would eventually cause the subordination of the political objectives to the military objectives and the emergence of a certain ‘routinization’ of the use of violence, as analyzed by Malcolm Deas (1999).

The consistency of violence and inequality throughout a contemporary history of the country has led to the general idea that violence is inherent to Colombians, either genetically, culturally or essentially; a position that annihilates any possibility of imagining a future peaceful society. Even if violence in Colombia has not been as bloody as, for instance, the great wars of the 20th century, it has been one of the most persistent in the world and, certainly, the longest one in the region. For many, this violence is not experienced as a catastrophe but as a standard aspect and discourse of every-day life. By this I do not mean to negate in any way or to deny the horror that this violence has both directly and indirectly caused to millions of individuals in the country; my intention is simply to note that, as stated by Vivenç Fisas, “throughout the war, people get used to violence as a routinized social phenomenon” (2012: 19). The heterogeneity, irregularity, extension and low impact (in relation to its duration) of the Colombian conflict have led to its assimilation by the State and

¹ Any variations on this term such as ‘conflict’ or ‘internal conflict’ are only to avoid repetition.

² The assassination of the liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (1903-1948) occurred on April 9, 1948 in Bogotá unleashed popular uprisings throughout the country. In Bogotá, massive looting occurred and several buildings in the downtown area were reduced to rubble.

society – a sort of ‘banality of violence’ (Pécaut).³ Indeed, violence – particularly the one related to the armed conflict – has not destabilized or thrown into crisis the notion of normality. Due to its longevity and consistency, it has transformed it altogether. For different portions of the Colombian population, it has even been regarded as a social process that offers opportunities (economic gain and both legal and illegal work), political accommodations and follows norms and regulations (Pécaut, 1997). Certainly, there exists a perception of violence as a legitimate resource for solving all sorts of economic and political issues.

The importance of understanding how an event such as war or conflict is understood and on recognizing the discourses through which it is narrated and conceptualized helps us locate ourselves within the geographies of political action and identity. The ways in which a society is imagined allows it to not only determine its own identity traits, but also to perceive its divisions, legitimize its powers and elaborate formative models for its citizens (Baczko, 1991). How violence is visualized, by who and for whom becomes of utmost importance, as the hegemonic discourses produced by the elites and the powerful prioritize what gets to be seen, and what remains invisible, what is present and what is excluded about historical processes. The flow of images through vertical power structures promulgates the production and spread of cultural discourses intended as forms of persuasion. We can exemplify this process with the uses of propaganda in authoritarian regimes, but also in the lighter forms of memory conceived under liberal mandates that construct dominant historic and political orders that are used to visualize violence both from within and outside the country’s borders. The images that result from this process of manufacture mediate how urban (but also rural) sectors of a population relate to conflict. In this text, we will abide by author Nicholas Mirzoeff’s definition of visuality as a “technique, specific to colonial and imperial action that operates both at ‘home’ and abroad, through which power visualizes History for itself” (2013, p. xxx.).

As a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that includes such a wide array of actors, the Colombian conflict has for long been accounted through distinct descriptions and versions, depending on who the storyteller is. One of the most defining narratives that has shaped the socio-political unconscious emerged the year Colombia abandoned the bipartisan (liberal-conservative) scheme and finally enabled a multi-partisan system. The political campaign of the Álvaro Uribe Vélez government (2002 – 2010) effectively fabricated a narrative that drove a large part of the population to simplistically conceive the FARC-EP⁴ group (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Popular Army) as terrorists, which, Claudia Gordillo (2014) states, contributed to the polarization of the socio-political reality. According to the author, during both of his presidency terms, Uribe’s communication strategy was to romanticize the support of the military campaign against the guerrillas. This method implied setting up a scenery in which military soldiers (AKA the heroes of the nation) were willing to give their lives fighting ‘terrorist’ guerrilla groups that defied the democratic regime, while denying attention to any other involved individuals. The reductionist character of representations of violence demonized and marginalized guerrilla soldiers to such an extent that those who demobilized faced terrible difficulties reintegrating into society. So much so that it was not unusual for a lot of them to go back into taking arms. The display of

³ Pécaut’s ‘banality of conflict’ echoes the conceptualization of the ‘banality of evil’ as developed by Hannah Arendt (1963).

⁴ The FARC-EP (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército Popular*) emerged in 1964 as the union between the peasant guerrillas that could not be dismantled by the National Front and some members of the Communist Party that were unable to secure a spot on the political stage of the country.

this Manichean narrative of the Colombian conflict echoed the discourse being developed by the U.S.A. at that time (who by then was an ally and had foreign interests in Colombia). Let us remember that in 2001 the U.S. included the FARC and ELN (National Liberation Army⁵) in its list of terrorist groups, and that the September 11 attacks during the same year advanced the inauguration of a Eurocentric world order in which terrorism became the new global enemy. In order to insert Colombia in the global war against terrorism, Uribe legitimized the militarization of society while concealing the origins of the political conflict in the country. He proposed a definition of the conflict as a confrontation between a homogeneous nation assembled around the State's military efforts to defeat those 'terrorists' without political legitimacy, in this case, the FARC. This particular hegemonic discourse would prove successful as the most relevant mass media obediently abided to his government's mandate (Gordillo 2014) and ignored one of the most important aspects of the guerrilla situation in the country: the surprisingly large number of involved organizations (both legal and illegal), and their profoundly different political ideologies.

Let us quickly remember that the fragmentation and variations between the Continent's guerrilla organizations is extremely extensive and includes diverse ideological allegiances such as pro-Cuban as the ELN, pro-soviets as the FARC, pro-Chinese as the EPL, the Patria Libre MIR and the PRT, indigenists as the MAQL, national-populist as the M-19, among others (Pizarro 2017).⁶ One of the main reasons of why it took so many years, political systems and approaches to reach a fully functional peace treaty was the incapacity of most governments to advance a comprehensive peace treaty that included the totality of the armed fractions (Nasi 2007).⁷ Even when some fragments of guerrilla would demobilize, the persistence of other hesitant groups would prolong the internal conflict for decades. Indeed, one of the most characteristic features of the peace processes in Colombia has been the fractalization of negotiations (group by group) scattered throughout the years.

The visualization of peace negotiations between the State and guerrilla groups is certainly an interesting one. Dialogs about peace were for long conceived as a war tactic for the military project. At times, demobilizations or ceasefire worked as a provisional break or truce in which all parties involved improved their military and political strength and prepared

⁵ The ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) emerges as a group with a strong revolutionary ideology based on social analysis. In 1964, inspired by the Cuban revolution and the ideas of Che Guevara, a group of activists belonging to the Communist Party and the liberal left founded the ELN, whose epicenter is Santander.

⁶ It is important to note that in Latin-America, there have been two great 'guerrilla waves'. The first one settled after the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959 and followed a highly rigid ideology, as it was linked to revolutionary models and power centers such as Moscow, Beijing, Havana and, at some point, Albania as well. Not only did the members of this group fed on orthodox Marxism-Leninism, but also on the idealization of the armed struggle as indispensable for the revolution. The second wave expanded due to the triumph of the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979.

⁷ The M-19 guerrillas laid down their arms before the Socialist International Delegation. This was the first peace process reached at in Colombia and in Latin-America with a post-revolutionary Cuban guerrilla group. The signing of peace between the M-19 group and the government of Virgilio Barco in 1990, and a year later, between the majority fraction of the EPL, the MAQL and the PRT, had an enormous impact in Central America. However, a paradox emerges: the peace agreement in El Salvador 1992 and Guatemala 1996 would not have been possible without the Colombian experience. Colombia was a pioneer in the negotiated solution to armed conflicts in Latin America, but at the same time, the one to continue suffering the hardships of political violence.

new strategies before the next inevitable armed confrontation. Further, there emerged a detrimental ‘competition’ for popularity between the guerrilla groups who tried hard to stand out under the mass media spotlight, “a sort of ‘mediatic egocentrism” (Pizarro, 2017: 31); in short, peace negotiations became news spectacles in themselves. Knowing well that the other party would not accept, incredible proposals of peace agreements were at times displayed in the negotiating tables with the purpose of evidencing the other’s unwillingness of peace and delegitimizing them before the public opinion. The analysts and activists that condoned this subordination of the negotiations to the logic of the armed conflict condoned “a harmful idea: that it is normal and understandable that guerrilla groups realize all sorts of armed actions, both before and during peace negotiations in order to demonstrate their power.” (Pizarro: 298). This utilitarian vision of peace negotiations evidences how conflict was understood as unbridgeable, and peace itself not just unattainable, but not even imaginable as a possible reality.

Former president Juan Manuel Santos⁸ proposed a more efficient historical strategy by acknowledging an ‘internal conflict’ as part of the history of violence in the country, and integrating the guerrilla groups into the official discourse. While this acknowledgment diverted attention from the political origins of the conflict,⁹ it certainly aided peace negotiations. Let us remember FARC’s urge at being internationally visualized as a political party in all its rights. Former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez went a long way by acknowledging the sovereignty of the FARC guerrilla and, that as such, they should also be acknowledged a state of belligerence. Even if Chávez’ words gave them hope and fed the illusion that they eventually would be granted belligerency, that never happened. It would only be years after, thanks to both a political prevalence of right and center-right governments in the continent and a generational change, that conversations about peace were eventually re-established. Further, the recognition of the existence of an internal armed conflict (not as a simple terrorist threat as in the previous government), and therefore, the willingness of attributing a political character to the guerrilla groups (not just branding them as ‘terrorists’ and delegitimizing them as a political force) motivated peace agendas. Pizarro argues that these primary factors allowed for a new visuality of the conflict, which instead of ruralizing time (‘the prolonged popular war’), focused more on immediate agency, the time of political action.

1.2. Peace treaty and the representation of the victim.

Peace negotiations began in September, 2012. The dialogues were held in Havana, Cuba with the participation of the FARC, 60 representatives of victims, the Colombian government, and several other entities and humanitarian organizations. After 4 years of negotiations and enormous social tensions, all parties crafted the official Final Agreement and established in

⁸ Santos was Secretary of Defense during Uribe’s mandate. Some analysts state that Santos’ campaign advertised as a continuation of his predecessor’s harsh policies and military warfare against the guerrilla groups was the main reason behind his election. Santos is the 40th president of the Republic of Colombia (2010 – 2018).

⁹ As stated by Serrano: By identifying the guerrilla groups as the adversary in the armed conflict, and calling them to the negotiating table during peace negotiations initiated in Havana in 2012, the Colombian government placed the onus of peace in the hands of the guerrilla groups. The conflict in Colombia is thus represented as the result of guerrilla violence and the guerrillas’ refusal of the conditions imposed by the government. This representation downplays or overlooks the role of the government and paramilitary forces in the conflict. (2010: 116).

this way a discursivity resolving the end of the long conflict. The text, which is composed of 297 pages, includes 143 measures, programs, plans, projects and legislative reforms, from which 14 are made specifically for armed actors (FARC and military forces) and include the subjects of amnesty law, the integration of the JEP (Special Peace Jurisdiction), and reincorporation process. The other 129 measures were designed for society in general, not only with the aim of repairing victims, but of putting an end to the structural causes of war altogether. These last causes were identified in the Havana negotiations as matters of access and use of land, political participation of social democracy, and the issue illegal economies, considered an engine of the war. By placing an emphasis on measures of wellbeing for the society and victims in general, the Colombian peace approach has represented an international pioneer and exemplary process regarding the subject of victim reparation; and, consequently, has brought along the most fundamental aspect of the peace situation: the birth of the victim.

The emergence of the concept of the victim as a subject, for use in government peace-building efforts, started brewing in 2011, when the *Ley de víctimas y restitución de tierras* (Victims and Land Restitution Law) revitalized discussions about the actors of the conflict. By bringing about a new focus on the victims, the importance of debating conflict – instead of simply co-habiting with it – was reinforced. According to the Colombian government website, it is “the law by which measures of care, assistance and comprehensive reparation were established for the victims of the internal armed conflict.”¹⁰ In other words, it was created with the purpose not only of acknowledging victim’s rights to know the truth and to justice, but also to be repaired by way of compensation, physical and psychological rehabilitation, symbolic reparation and land restitution. The institution of this particular law made victims the main focus of the peace-building endeavors by acknowledging their existence and integrating them into the official national post-conflict narrative.

The ‘victim’ that was born under the protection of this Law was no longer understood as a person in need of humanitarian care but as a subject with the right of knowing the truth, receiving justice and reparation, and of being granted guarantees of non-repetition. The signing of the peace treaty in 2016¹¹ between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP guerrilla organization strategized peace-building endeavors by focusing on acknowledging victims’ centrality in community-building and in the country’s reconstitution of subjectivity.

1.3. The role of cinema: Literature review.

Since the 1960’s, the portrayal of minorities and marginal groups along with their relationship to the dominant and colonial ones has been one of the most significant constants in Colombian cinema. This comes as no surprise if we take into account that poverty and limited political representation have deepened social and economic inequality in the region for decades (Marín Taborda, 2005: 33).¹² Armed conflict, far from aiding to bridge social

¹⁰ The full description is to be found at:

[http://www.justiciatransicional.gov.co/Normatividad/Ley-de-V%C3%ADctimas-y-Restituci%C3%B3n-de-Tierras#:~:text=Ley%201448%20de%202011%20\(Ley,y%20se%20dictan%20otras%20disp osiciones.](http://www.justiciatransicional.gov.co/Normatividad/Ley-de-V%C3%ADctimas-y-Restituci%C3%B3n-de-Tierras#:~:text=Ley%201448%20de%202011%20(Ley,y%20se%20dictan%20otras%20disp osiciones.)

¹¹ There was actually a second version of the peace treaty. After the non-ratification by the Colombian voters of the first in a plebiscite in 2016, the new version was signed by the Santos government and the FARC-EP group, privately in 2017.

¹² Iván Marín Taborda underlines four principle causes at the root of the endemic violence in Colombia: i) the institutional weakness of the State, its ineffective judicial system and

divisions, victimized the minoritarian communities and further reinforced their marginal status (Yepes, 2018). This dynamic inevitably incurred in a strategic dominance of the political and cultural 'voices' that are sustained in the omission / poor visibility of marginal ones. By framing the imaginary and symbolic universe of what constitutes that which is 'Colombian', cinema holds an important role in understanding how society acknowledges its identity. Indeed, from time to time, some sectors of the Colombian society "discover the "other" by way of the pact and the law, but more regularly it has been an overall discovery (of borders, aboriginal peoples, black communities) through the routes of violence" (Sánchez, 2004: 27-28); while some forms of violence are only made available through mass media and the formal exploration of socio-political structures. This dynamic reinforces the potential of cinema to enrich the imaginary of conflict and to fill some of the gaps in meaning/sense that the actual experience of violence is not able to resolve. In other words, cinema not only represents conflict, it mediates it. As Goldman argues, "the discourse of narrative cinema interacts with the identity of historiographic and political analyses, with ideological practice and claims of knowledge" (1997, 62).

Studies, such as the one conducted by Agudelo Ramírez (2017) argue that a general representation of the inner conflict reveals the absence and weakness of the Colombian State in terms of the management of the social violence that has been lodged for so many years. From these analyses, the political State is understood as an absent institution that does not safeguard any freedoms while remaining quite indifferent to the actions of non-state armed actors (Agudelo Ramírez 2017). Moreover, Pizarro (2004) suggests two characteristics most frequently presented in national films made before the new film law: the effected terror and the criminalization of the actors in the conflict. This is verified, according to Pizarro, when the narrative representation of the civilian population is analyzed, as it is always portrayed as a passive character, victim of the conflict and without possibilities of action or salvation. The generalized conclusion of these analyses is that the films are pessimistic, yet recurrent, regarding the outcomes to the issues of inner conflict.

The "obsessive" preoccupation of the Colombian culture in portraying violence has been interpreted by some authors (Pizarro, Jaramillo, 2006) as a limiting agency in the national production of cultural forms. The texts that abide by this theory tend to limit the analysis of the wide circulation of affects that mediate the images of the Colombian conflict to one singular affective structure of their choice. The apathy theory, for instance, assumes the Colombian spectator to be generally insensitive towards victims of violence (Yepes 2018). By privileging apathy as the predominant emotional tendency of the population, this framework makes the assumption that the larger portion of society (predominately urban) has not been affected by the consequences of conflict¹³ and, most importantly, denies "any

compromised political legitimacy; ii) the armed conflict, in the form of clashes between armed groups and state armed forces since the 1960s; iii) the consequences of drug-trafficking: large-scale corruption and murder; and iv) high levels of social and economic inequality reflected in widespread poverty and restricted political representation and participation (2005: 33).

¹³ To engage into a discussion about the role of memory in the Colombian armed conflict it is important to highlight the supremacy of urban novels as compared to the low presence of rural ones in the national production and consumption of narratives. Indeed, most of the narratives about the Colombian inner conflict are weaved and filtered in the cities, where the concentration of public and mass media is managed and also where socio-political decisions are made. The hegemonic perspective of the city has a tendency to ignore the rural struggle, which favors the invisibility of violence in the countryside. In consequence, most rural victims of the Colombian conflict are written out of literature and out of history.

political potential to anger, fear, rage, desire for vengeance, indignation and repulsion in the national and global scene” (Nussbaum, 2013, 2016, 2018; Arias-Maldonado, 2017 in Tobón 2020: 13). Another theory (Jaramillo 2006), widely popular, argues that the Colombian society is currently undergoing a state of collective melancholy which causes in the population a sort of fixation around events of violence, which it consumes over and over again. As Tobón notes, positions such as these ones “imply a collective Colombian subject, with a stable identity that is defined by its psychological state” (2020: 11). While surely all of these affective systems play a role in the mediation of, and citizen engagement to, conflict, they are also restrictive as they tend to generalize interpretations of the structural problematics that articulate the Colombian society. Previous scholarly work on the representation of the conflict in cinema (such as Agudelo Ramírez 2016) have illustrated that the armed conflict is defined as a problem that has ideological roots that stem from the abandonment of the State, social inequality and a weak national identity. The conflict is characterized as being linked to the world of drugs and illegality, having as direct actors the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the victim population, the mass media, and the Colombian government. Regarding the other actors in the conflict, the characters' combatant status is not explicit in its ideological roots and sometimes the armed affiliation is omitted (surely as life insurance for the director) or their actions are justified by having been victims of violent acts themselves. While previously studied films are pessimistic about alternative solutions to the issues of the conflict, their approach to this reality is fragmented and the issue of inner conflict is often just an excuse for the recreation of other kinds of narratives.

Research under these general frameworks evidence two separate type of analyses regarding the Colombian inner conflict: studies from different disciplines of the human sciences (anthropology (Castellanos 2016), sociology (Robayo 2013), psychology (Arciniegas and Pérez 2019), history (Calderón Rojas 2016; Ríos 2016)); or works that approach cinema from a specifically artistic or formalist perspective and based on film criticism, production study, character arch, and genre classification (Ruiz, S. 2009; Botero 2011; Torres and Villamizar 2017). There is, therefore, a divorce between cinematographic analysis and the analysis of cinema as a document of social reality and mediator in a reconciliatory process. There is a great void around how cinema engages with this problematic; one so necessary today as reparative and re-creator of a country's history. This project aims at filling that theoretical gap while seeking to highlight the system of relations between the armed conflict and the capacity of cinema to shape the collective identity and imagining of the national conflict. In this regard, this thesis will be concerned with the way in which concepts related to the internal conflict and violence come to be defined by meanings that are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes.

1.4. Methodology.

In the current political milieu, the role of cinema in mediating the Colombian imaginary is modified by an influx of cultural influences and democratic requirements. As pointed out by Rubén Darío Yepes, “although the signing of the agreement between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the guerrilla of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) meant the beginning of the end of the conflict, the country still has to face the articulation of the historical memory of the country, the reparation of the more than seven million victims, and overcome the social legacy of five decades of violence” (2018: 26-27). Regarding the role of cinema in such a task, it is important to note that the number of films that explore aspects of the conflict has increased along with the conceptual development of cinema – and art in general – as a tool for victim reparation and justice. It becomes pertinent to assume a

visualization of the groups and sectors of society affected by violence (in all its forms and disguises) not simply as victims of systemic violence but as indicators of the various perspectives-issues that mediate the functioning of society. Indeed, the strategic selection of this discursive positioning will allow us to evidence the collective conceptions of conflict, post-conflict and peace that give shape to the socio-political intersections at the core of structural violence.

The mediation of conflict carried out in mass media narratives is most evident when studying the influence and reinforcing of social conditions promoted by specific ways of portraying the various sectors of society. In consequence, in this text I will examine 3 contemporary Colombian films that in one way or another engage with the social conjunctions that are fundamental to the Colombian conflict: *Alma de héroe* (Orlando Pardo, 2019), *Matar a Jesús* (*Killing Jesus*, Laura Mora, 2017) and *Pájaros de Verano* (*Birds of Passage*, Ciro Guerra, 2018). The point in doing so is not to condemn marginality as a mere symbol for victimhood, nor to try and identify the cause of the various forms of violence that afflict diverse sectors of society. It is also not the purpose of this text to further the belief that giving voice to marginal peoples is the key to social liberation, vindication or the basis of democratic requirements for ideal post-conflict societies. Nor does this text represent a proper space to make estimated assumptions on the success / failure of the peace-building efforts promoted by the signing of the 2016 - 2017 peace treaty. Instead, the focus of the arguments made in the next chapters will be in identifying the forms through which social dysfunction is represented and sustained in collective imaginaries, shaped by mass media themselves.

Special attention will be given to highlighting different forms of marginality, as they promote specific visualizations of inherent social power structures and discourses. Moreover, the narratives analyzed in this text are not fully considered marginal themselves. Rather, they are productions (partly financed with Colombian film commission incentives) that rely on the filmmakers' personal encounter with violence – which serve as the inspiration for the productions. As we will see, this places the aspirations of the films at a crossroads between the narrative mechanisms of victim testimony, ambiguity of social discourses, symbolic powers and the positioning of the participants in the cultural space. This negotiation of values emphasizes the complex systems of hierarchies surrounding the figure of the narrator as a valid carrier of memory. In effect, in this text memory is understood as “a collective experience articulated through mass media” (Martin, Wall, 2013: 450).

By choosing these popular mass media productions, this project will examine the forms in which mainstream media produces a specific shared memory of conflict while articulating a collective identity. I will trace the kinds of narrative structure and portrayal of various socio-political figures present in the chosen films while focusing on the representations of those affected by violence and/or understood as victimized. The analysis of this corpus of films will be directed towards determining the prevalent narratives and the role of these figures in said narratives. Through a cultural and textual analysis of these films, I will explore three main articulations of discourses that give shape to the collective experience of conflict. It is important to notice that all three films were produced in the cultural setting of post-treaty strategies of identity-building and had a great performance in box-office. In order to highlight the efforts that validate official State (national) narratives, in the first chapter, I will conduct an analysis of the film *Alma de héroe* (2019), which explores relevant notions of institutionality, nation-building and the State's understanding of social cohesion. For the second chapter, the film *Matar a Jesús* (2017) will provide us with a framework through which to discuss urban and cultural marginality in relation to youth and the problem of modernity. Finally, in the third chapter, I will examine the conjunction between ethnicity, tradition and globalization present in *Pájaros de Verano* (2018), and which also represents one of the main dichotomies in current ethnographic cultural production. The analysis of

these main frameworks in collective visualizations of conflict will help distinguish the discursive configurations and intersections of violence, which are external to films themselves, yet mediated by them. In effect, the premise of this thesis is structured on the analysis of these films inasmuch as they provide central frameworks, both formally and in terms of content, that are key to the mediation and consolidation of narratives of violence and post-conflict. Here, again, violence and conflict are constituted as the determinant discursive articulations of Colombian cinema (Suárez: 89).

2. IMAGINING PEACE AND BUILDING THE NATION

The media strategy mandated in the peace treaty was developed with the purpose of giving voice to marginal communities while rehabilitating the collective identities that were previously completely disregarded or even, in some cases, demonized; as well as facilitating the distribution and accessibility to the new narratives. As stated on the treaty, one of the main characteristics regarding the communication / media strategy is that:

An appropriate approach will be transversal to the development of the Commission that makes it possible to highlight the differential ways in which the conflict has among others. This should also contribute to raising awareness in Colombian society of the specific ways in which the conflict reproduced historical mechanisms of discrimination, as a fundamental first step to have a more just and inclusive society.¹⁴

After over 60 years of internal conflict, the lateness in the attribution of narratives to victims of violence in Colombia indicates that a fundamental step towards healing trauma and reconstructing both personal and community identities is being taken. It is clear that the acknowledging of the actors of the conflict that were previously ‘invisibilized’ set the ground for peace and is a fundamental component of the post-conflict situation. The shift from “there are victims” to “these are the victims and these are their stories” (Gordillo) implies recognizing and validating their narrations, accepting and understanding their feelings, motivations, hardships and identifications. It means giving victims a place both in society and history by legitimizing their memory. Indeed, in order to be productive and long-lasting, the first thing that peace has to change is an imaginary; and the construction of self-value and of identity helps reformulate that imaginary (Uribe, 2016).

Such is the purpose of most (if not all) government mandated or funded audiovisual projects / products. Certainly, narratives articulated under institutional mandates materialize the clear purpose of articulating not only specific versions of history and conflict, but also of determining the current state of the nation and/or society by formulating the images (identities) through which different sectors of society relate to one another. It is why institutional narratives become an important locus of knowledge regarding the understanding of Colombia’s post-conflict situation.

2. 1. The Institution has an *Alma de héroe* (Orlando Pardo, 2019).

Alma de héroe (2019), directed by Orlando Pardo, portrays military combatants and their families as victims of the Colombian conflict. Pardo himself has argued in various interviews that the film is inspired in real life experiences of people (whom he knew personally) and that the storyline is articulated with the purpose of humanizing the Colombian soldier. Such objective responds to the general lack of trust that the Colombian people have developed towards the National Army,¹⁵ which also leaves no place to wonder why such National institution financed the production. Although it takes place in the middle of the conflict,

¹⁴ National Government of Colombia, FARC-EP and guarantor countries. *Final Agreement for the Termination of Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace. Final Agreement*. La Habana, Cuba. 2016.

¹⁵ This distrust was reinforced after the ‘*falsos positivos*’ (false positives) became a standard military mechanism to recognize progress and warfare success in front of the general population. In addition to the recurrent collaboration between the National Army and paramilitary groups who have carried out large numbers of massacres and violence throughout the country.

Pardo assures that *Alma de héroe* is not mainly a war film, but rather a Shakespearean tragedy, involving two lovers who must separate for reasons beyond their control – contextualized in the midst of the armed conflict in the Colombian jungles.

The storyline follows Miguel Tabares and Alexander Cohen, two young Second Lieutenants recently graduated from the Military School, who experience firsthand the crudeness of war. Tabares faces not only the challenge of encountering the conflict for the first time, but also confessing to his best friend and colleague, Cohen, that he has a sentimental relationship with Cohen's sister, Salma. The capture of Cohen as a hostage in an ambush set up by a guerrilla front changes the course of Tabares' life, as he is ordered to travel to the area his partner went missing, on the exact same day he was planning on proposing to Salma. In fact, Tabares is forced to travel to the area where Cohen was kidnapped without first having the opportunity to talk to his girlfriend and let her know he will not be able to meet her. Unbeknownst to Tabares, Salma eventually learns that her parents hid to her the fact that she has cancer, and finally concludes that Tabares left without an explanation because he would rather have a relationship with a healthy woman unlike her. The premise of the film is that the conflict is not only faced and suffered by the military or the guerrilla combatants, but by the entire circle of loved ones. The anguish felt by a soldier who must fight in the mountains is experienced as uncertainty and agony for the family, as they can never know for sure where their loved one might be, and under what conditions. In short, the armed conflict affects anyone who comes near it, either directly or indirectly.

Pardo had the advice and accompaniment of active officers of the Colombian National Army on tactical issues, which added to realism regarding the portrayal of military life. The research done by the director certainly aids a viewer with minimum levels of knowledge on the Colombian conflict to follow the heroes of the film into the very heart of the jungles of Caquetá, Putumayo, Amazonas, Tolima, Bogotá and the upper Guajira. However, it is due to this precise support (perhaps even debt) that the narrative develops quite a biased point of view that is made evident when the representation of the army 'heroes' is contrasted to that of the guerrilla combatants. Indeed, the army soldiers are all skilled and capable heroes, while the guerrilla members are anonymous and evil beings who enjoy cruelly torturing and massacring innocent and hard-working soldiers.

In the film, there are no spaces for gray or ambiguous areas. In one scene, some guerrilla members are successfully apprehended during a raid to a cocaine processing plant. One of them turns out to be a 15-year-old kid, and Tabares rightfully laments the situation. However, the kid ends up dying tragically and violently by a guerrillera woman who shoots him when he gives up information about the location of the rest of the guerrilla front. In this way, the "tragedy of war" is illustrated and the inclusion of children in the armed conflict (and their deaths) is portrayed as one amongst many terrible consequences of the perverse methods carried out by the guerrillas. Such is the inevitable fate of those brutal and inhuman beings that belong to guerrilla organizations – no matter how young or inexperienced they might be.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is precisely due to its defined ideology and symbolic system that the film is as praised by some critics, as it is condemned by others.

Throughout *Alma de héroe*, Tabares and his command group will be protagonists of typical Rambo-like (Hollywood) action sequences. Accompanied by rock music soundtrack, we see them eat maggots, train in the jungle, exercise in the desert, and run under the rain.

¹⁶ Also, completely ignoring the fact that some of these youngsters were forced into taking arms, and others embraced the opportunity to make a living that guerrilla groups proposed to them and which the State never did.

Some of these images seem gratuitous.¹⁷ While sequences with large amounts of special effects evidence an improvement in the field of formality for Colombian cinema (especially in action films), the romantic scenes have an aura of melodramatic soap operas. The hero soldier, in this case, represents the ideal combinations of manly virtues.¹⁸ He brands himself as physically strong, fearless, and just kind-hearted and vulnerable enough so the viewer can deeply empathize with him. Moreover, we witness Tabares in multiple scenes tell his teammates to leave their fears behind, no matter how scared they might be, claiming that “death can smell fear”; and even walking in front of his military formation because “a real leader does not hide behind the bodies of other soldiers.” The polarization present in the character arc also reflects the general belief that presenting tragic stories that make people tear up constitutes a genuine way of approaching victims’ narratives; which is why, the emotional vulnerabilities of military soldiers are explored. In fact, half way through the film a voice over (which we later come to find out are the words of Cohen’s diary while in captivity) reminds us the challenges faced by the army during operations in the “magic of the jungle, that perfect space to encounter death”:

We were soldiers, sub-officers and officers. But before all that, we were men facing faith. Men from flesh and bone transformed into a family in order to encounter the inclemency of the territory [...] carrying over 40 kilos of equipment in our backs [...] living in the midst of the armed conflict, one that none of its protagonists knew why it existed. Perhaps it was the ignorance of some, and the irony of others, the only reason to live a war that nobody asked for.

While this statement might implicitly avoid blaming specific parties of the developing internal warfare, the polarized narration of *Alma the héroe* attributes complete responsibility to the guerrillas for the violence of the country while lifting any culpability off the shoulders of the State. Throughout the film, guerrilla soldiers will remain unnamed and anonymous. Indeed, the only person that gets to have a dialogue or be identified is Marcelino, the fearful teenager who intends to collaborate with the army by answering questions after the army successfully ambushes the cocaine processing plant. Besides Marcelino, the rest of his group reflect no emotion on their faces whatsoever at any point in the film. In addition, guerrilla combatants are portrayed in open / wide shots, and at times half of their bodies are not even included in the frame. By distancing the characters from the camera’s lens and by limiting any form of identification or sympathy to be articulated by the spectator, they are not visualized as individuals, but rather as a mass of de-humanized and violent criminals. In fact, during the raid of the cocaine production plant, Tabares orders his men not to shoot, and assures guerrilla combatants that their lives will be respected, subtly articulating moral and humanistic superiority of the army men over guerrilla delinquents. Moreover, the portrayal of women is also limited to two particular traits. On the one hand, there is the high-class, urban victim and/or suffering woman. In this case, Salma gets sick and her mother is seen throughout the film lamenting about both her daughter’s disease and the kidnapping of her

¹⁷ Indeed, Didyme-Dôme (2019) argues that because of this, “*Alma de héroe* is closer to pro-war films that reduce the ideological weight of war to give way to light action, such as *The Green Berets*, *Rambo*, *Prisoners of War*, *Navy Seals*, *Iron Eagle* or *Top Gun*; setting a distance from anti-war films that evidence the horror and absurdity of war, as were the classics of the genre *All Quiet on The Western Front*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Thin Red Line* or *Black Hawk Down*”.

¹⁸ Serrano rightly describes the resulting simplified triadic scenario of ‘aggressor’, ‘victim’, and ‘saviour’ as privileging state sources (configured as the ‘saviour’), and excluding other actors: the ‘victim’ (innocent civilians), and the ‘aggressor’ (illegal armed groups) (Serrano, 2012: 24, 59, 113).

military son. On the other, we find the rustic *bandolera*, the guerrilla combatant who is always deceitful and cruel.¹⁹

As the voice-over highlights the world of illegality from which guerrilla groups finance themselves – cocaine cultivation, illegal mining, extortion, kidnapping, etc. – appeals to the moral sensibility of the viewers by sensationally describing the inclusion of children in warfare as “the most atrocious and inconceivable crime”. Indeed, the army’s encounter with Marcelino is depicted as the unforgivable, ultimate original sin that caused the Colombian territory to be “forgotten by God”. While the purpose behind the demonization of some characters serves to highlight the good nature and humanism of the army soldiers, the film inadvertently rejects any cause of violence other than the gratuitous aggressivity and sheer violent will of the guerrilla groups. Issues regarding the State, inequality, poverty, corruption, economic and political marginalization have no space in *Alma de héroe* and the historical conception of conflict it intends to promote.

Despite Pardo’s claim that the film does not intend to be political in any way, from the beginning of *Alma de héroe* we are presented with a documentary-like written summary explaining the origins and longitude of the internal war that characterizes the so-called period of violence in Colombia. The director claims to be “leaving a piece of historical memory to the country” (2019). However, by privileging institutional visualizations and narratives of the Colombian conflict and marginalizing others (considered too inhuman to be worthwhile), the film cannot avoid articulating a single and unidirectional historical reality. And that in itself is a political act. The tragic, fatal story of the heroes of Colombia feed popular imagination and indignation while advertising institutionalized systems of morality. Tabares, for instance, dies honorably while saving his friend from capture. He has died for the cause; he has died a hero. At the same time, the brutality of violence is used to legitimize the warfare actions of the National Army for an audience who is expected to be grateful and sympathize with the heroes’ difficult job of protecting the life of civilians. This discursive strategy of *Alma de héroe* redirects ethical affect and communal conceptions of peace towards the context of the conflict, thus giving it political power.²⁰ In a sense, we can draw a parallel between the narrative of the film and its wide use of formal elements (constituent of the action genre) to the communication strategy developed during the government of ex-president Álvaro Uribe Vélez. The branding of the military as a heroic institution is tightly linked to the efforts of the Colombian State in getting a thumbs up from its ally, the United States of America.

As a way of reinforcing its historical accuracy the film closes with short descriptions of the current lives of the people who inspired Pardo to write the script. The testimonial effect is here combined with the sensationalist, stereotypical narrative of the film that fails to provide sufficient context for audiences to grasp the complexity of the stakes and interests involved, due to pressure from State and/or economic interests.²¹ The Colombian conflict is

¹⁹ In an interview, Pardo claims that it is because the film explores the suffering of love and of the families of army men that the film would be particularly accepted and praised by women, who would be the ones to boost the box office from ‘mouth to mouth’. In a way, he himself acknowledges a tragic destiny for Colombian women who he seems to define through feelings of agony and romanticism (2019).

²⁰ In her book *Media Security*, Claudia Gordillo studies the figure of the hero in the militarist propaganda of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez. Gordillo illustrates that the use of this figure in order to get citizen support for the army was not accompanied by a significant improvement in the conditions of war veterans. See: Claudia Gordillo, 2014 *Seguridad mediática: la propaganda militarista en la Colombia contemporánea*.

²¹ Serrano argues that public perception and understanding of the conflict in Colombia and its resulting violence are highly mediated through the political discourse. Indeed, she underlines

incorporated performatively in films which, as is the case in *Alma de héroe*, are presented as part of the testimonies of those in direct contact with warfare. The communal perception of the internal conflict is evidently informed and manipulated by political and military standards of the present day, in efforts to promote the film as an act of memory that strives to render the mission of the National Army in meaningful terms. The guerrilla group, unnamed, unclear and undefined, is visualized in *Alma de héroe* at the margins of discourse, morality and humanity itself. The heroes, by contrast, are courageous neoliberal subjects who can save us all through sheer will. In fact, when some of them are scared or unwilling or untrained enough, they are promptly disciplined and corrected into fitting a proper idea of ‘hero’.²²

This precise incapacity (or unwillingness) to recognize the relationship between structural, symbolic, interpersonal and everyday forms of violence has been for decades one of the engines of conflict in the country. In *Basta ya! Colombia: Memorias de guerra y dignidad*, researchers from the Museo Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Center for Historical Memory 2013) argue that the inability of the Colombian society to face the social legacy of the conflict is one of the symptoms of a generalized collective trauma. Following this framework, it is evident from the film that Manichean forms of narration are set in place when ambivalence is hard to tolerate, especially for State institutions that have power over the national media forms of historical memory.

how media organizations frequently present sensationalist and stereotypical images (2014) of violent and/or historical events.

²² One can sense a neoliberal logic which allows controlled spaces for ‘doubt’ in the few moments of the film where the righteousness of a couple of them is questioned; in addition to the minor mistakes of some soldiers (considered out of line with the military honorary mandate) and which result in fatal consequences for them.

3. THE MARGINAL AND THE DIRTY

... and you well know that it is a right. As Foucault claimed: It is up to us individuals to be outraged, and to the governments to reflect and act. Restlessness, we have to keep restlessness alive.

Paula's father concluding his lecture on the day he was killed.

Marginality is a violent act that excludes the individual from modern social institutions. The process of identifying the marginal is inherent to the universalist discourses of institutionalism, which define the marginal subject within the opposing yet dependent polarities that characterize modern thought. The value judgment that structures these binaries (such as functional / dysfunctional, civilized / savage, inclusion / exclusion, development / underdevelopment, etc.) indicates that the superiority of one pole necessarily results in the inferiority of the other. Therefore, disparate and dissimilar concepts are not considered complementary to hegemonic culture, but oppositional and averse altogether. If the institutions "base their rational and universalist discourse on the segregation of certain marginal collectivities, they replicate the institutional discourse transforming themselves into their traumatic image, one that is erased from consciousness but nevertheless works from within" (León, 2005:13). Since marginality emerges as such a discursive construction, representations of the marginal have the capacity not only of evidencing the exclusion mechanisms born out of institutionalism, but, most importantly, to contest against the smooth constitution of the "outside-less space" of the contemporary empire that Toni Negri and Michael Hardt proposed in their work *Empire* (2000). In this way, the representation of marginality means not just the exposure of the exteriority of modern culture, but a potential form of empowering inasmuch as it challenges the order and classifications established by social institutions. From this position of advantage, the limits of what is inside and what is outside are permanently transgressed (León).

For the purpose of this chapter, we will base the understanding of the notion of the marginal as the supplement of modern citizenship, as defined by Christian León (2005). According to the author, marginality represents the wretched part of the modernity coin. In this case, no matter how urgently the enlightened man tries to repress and hide it, the marginal represents the unknown interior of the neo-liberalist structure that depends on it. In consequence, the conception of the marginal as what is 'abject' and/or 'traumatic' implies the understanding of marginality as "a floating meaning that designates what was repressed by enlightened thought: the trace of postponed cultures that never spoke the language of the West" (León 13). Following Derrida's formulations regarding his analyses on the 'supplement', we can argue that the discursive production of the marginal is redefined as the "constitutive exteriority" of society that "necessarily operates from within" (1976). As a result, that which is social is configured through the exclusion of the collectives and social aspects that do not share the universality of rationalized or categorical values that allow for association (León 2005). This reciprocal movement between the marginal and the official is grounded in the interplay of images and visualities that articulate the collective imaginary.

León does a great job in illustrating the forms in which meaning is regulated throughout the interconnectedness of the conceptual frames he proposes. Following his arguments, I choose to employ a spatial understanding of marginality for this text, as I believe it to be useful in order to elucidate how the affective energies/dynamics of violence derive and flow through the social imaginary. Moreover, approaching various manifestations of violence represented in Colombian cinema as discursive axes (pivots) allows us the possibility of conceiving the marginal as a space of transgression, which, I believe, is the

most appropriate and productive tool for visualizing/making visible the topology of affects through which conflict is defined, articulated and given meaning.

Instituted to symbolize the existence of an indefinite and blurry area, the marginals are challenging subjects to visually represent. Attempts at portraying modernity's 'blind spot' have led to a cultural 'riposte' (Hayward, 2001:389) by those marginalized to the dominant "innumerable ethnographic, linguistic and even topographical blunders" (Stam and Spence, 1983:637), characteristic of colonialist discourses. This was precisely the aim of the Third Cinema, which intended to provide the "reverse shot" to western political and classical cinematic systems (Hayward 397), present in both First and Second Cinemas – the former primarily referring to Hollywood, and the latter to *auteur* and European art cinema. Third Cinema emerged in Argentina in 1969 when Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getting wrote a manifesto based on their experience in the production of the militant documentary, *La hora de los hornos* (1968) (filmed clandestinely during the military dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía). The emergence of this cinema was guided by a double imperative: to be anti-imperialist and nationalist, and to create a space on the screen for a new cinema with local content and roots (Chanan, 2014), in order to confront stereotypical representations of non-Western subjects. Such aesthetical strategy of opposition cannot, however, avoid feeding on the polarizing structure it seeks to destroy. In any case, Solanas and Getino's writings in Argentina, next to those of Glauber Rocha in Brazil and Julio García Espinosa's in Cuba (among a few others), established the textual foundations of the New Latin-American Cinema that emerged in the 60s and 70's.

During this interesting and fruitful decade for Third World Cinema,²³ filmmakers that aligned to the new cinematic trend thrived to create new, authentic images of the continent while reclaiming some of the means of representation that were taken from the rejected and unfavored communities, as well as the imaginaries that were imposed on them under the Eurocentric worldview. In the course of this wave, Latin-American fiction cinema produced films that portrayed characters usually erased from the collective imaginary by high culture spheres and that reflected the poverty and exclusion that had characterized the continent's different societies since the colonial period. By exploring social struggle and inequality, these films implement the transcendent mission²⁴ of a specific collective destiny; promoting, in the words of author Christian León, the myth of the Nation.²⁵ As highlighted by Ismail Xavier, this type of narrative is founded over the figure of the intellectual filmmaker, bearer of the

²³ Third World Cinema refers to the films made by countries that were not considered part of the dominant spheres after the Second World War, that is, the Soviet Union and the United States. Further, this cinema emerged from colonized or de-colonized nations, "whose economic and political structures have been shaped and deformed within the colonial process" (Stam and Spence, 1985: 635).

²⁴ In Bhaskar Saskar's "Theory of Third World Cinema", the author argues that Rocha's and Glauber's manifestos produce a reformulation of the understanding of lack of resources of the Latin-American societies. Instead of understanding the lack as the cause for underdevelopment and/or poverty (both cultural and economic), the manifestos embrace "the historical mission of liberating culture" by restructuring scarcity as a motivating force and "a part of everyday struggles" (2013: 2-3).

²⁵ According to León, "the New Latin American Cinema, arises as a strategy for the reconstitution of visual nationalism, as a result of the failure of the national-popular cinema that took place at the end of the fifties". It closes a first stage in the construction of mass space in Latin America characterized, according to Martín-Barbero, by the fundamental role played by the media in the conversion of "the masses into a people" and the "people into a nation" (1987: 178).

voice of the community. In this framework, “impoverished communities were represented through the hegemonic language and narrative structures, and forced to be seen from an external visualization that confined them either to the negativity of the stereotype or to the positivism of the paternalistic gaze.” (León, 2005: 24); this external vision belonging to the expansion of world systems of knowledge that were both unbalanced and aggressive. Moreover, the Hollywood structure – so despised by New Latin-American wave filmmakers – was determined to use the semiotic power of the cinematographic medium in order to advance the “imperatives of capital” by promoting economic growth and fostering political power (Grieverson, 2018). Due to its perceived capacity of influencing the behavior of specific populations, and under a regime of territorial imperialism, film played a fundamental role in global political and economic transformations. Latin-American filmmakers were certainly not unaware of the fact that the North-American capitalist and imperialist project interfered with the Third Worldist aspiration of fostering an internationalist revolution that had Cuba, the Tricontinental, and the Pan-Latin American alliances at its core.

Furthermore, the most ambitious characteristic of the New Latin-American Cinema responded to that precise international socio-economic interest of affirming a national popular culture (as opposed to a foreign imperialist / capitalist mass culture) while promoting national unity and a call for liberation (Xavier, 2000: 65). As Shohat and Stam (2014) have pointed out, much of Third World cinema is based on an idealized and conflict-free construction of the national whole that ignores cultural, racial and gender conflicts in the name of a unitary fight in favor of a permanently threatened national order. The power game that organized the representations of minorities dialed down the marginal voice in the name of a unitary constitution of the collective means of the nation. The dialectic opposition between a discursive hegemonic center and its dark peripheries negates the notion of a people as a unitary subject, and instead integrates a power dynamic between the ‘whole’ *People* [with a capital P] as a category implying an integral political body, and “the subset of the ‘people’ [with a lower-case P] as a fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies” (Agamben, 1998: 177). Author León seems to follow Agamben’s critique when he defines the modern political theory as a fulminating attempt at “suppressing the split that divides the people” (Dittus, 2019: 57) through the construction of the unitary concept of a social totality based on the denial of the existence of the excluded. Such is the framework of the New Latin-American Cinema.

The cultural shift brought along by globalization during the late 80s put an end to the homogenizing strategy of pursuing a national destiny, since the conception of a national identity as the supreme meta-narrative (as conceptualized by Lyotard in 1979) of social discourses came into crisis. León states that “based on the new permissiveness that has been experienced in Latin America since the late eighties, the mass media exploit and commercialize once censored images that are generally linked to a criminal and obscene account of marginal groups.” *Pornomiseria*, for instance, plays with the voyeuristic impulse of the spectator as it exploits (for commercial purposes) the fascination for violence and the obscenity of poverty that underlies the wishes of the citizen and the consumer. With good reason, Jesús Martín-Barbero speaks of the “media that live on fear” (2004: 21).

During political precarity in the region and “with the fall of the socialist project, Latin-American intellectuals lose their discursive support” (León 21) and as a result, the heterogeneity and complexity of transnational social dynamics become both evident and urgent. During the early 90s, a young generation of filmmakers – completely ‘disenchanted’ with all modern utopias and the myth of the nation in particular – explore new ways of making cinema that could be capable of embracing the heterogeneity of the Latin-American continent. This group of filmmakers deploy a specific form of restlessness whereby to represent the marginal and recognize their significance in the creation of national discourses.

By focusing on urban violence, and without any transformative or paternalistic considerations, these new films inquire into the mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization that structure social institutions.

3.1 Dirty but realist.

Coined in Spanish as *realismo sucio*, ‘dirty realism’ portrays *forgotten* characters (such as women, sexual minorities, homeless people, hitmen, criminals, etc.) whose actions fall outside of humanistic moral codes – considering that their condition of ‘marginal’ implies their abandonment and unrecognition by the State and its institutions. In front of the crisis of the modern political project, this branch of realism makes use of both fiction formulas and documentary techniques of *cinéma vérité* in order to reinterpret Glauber Rocha’s formulation of the aesthetics of hunger of the 70s while exposing the fatal costs of economic modernization.

Let us remember that Glauber Rocha in his manifesto of the Aesthetics of Hunger (1965) recognized Brazil as a colony both politically and economically dependent on foreign powers, leading to the impossibility of the country to think and take action according to its own needs. Following *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by Frantz Fanon, Rocha accentuates the spatial and structural conflict that “derives from the socio-economic, cultural and psychological border that separates the universe of hunger from the developed world” (Romero, 2016: 101). Rocha reflects on the generalized ‘hunger’ of Latin-America not simply as a review of cultural conditions and historical events that caused prevalent socio-economic inequalities, but rather as what best characterizes the continent; in other words, as the essence of Latin-American societies. As the direct materialization of hunger aesthetics, Brazilian Cinema Novo narrated and analyzed the main themes of hunger, mainly:

characters eating the earth, characters eating roots, characters stealing for food, characters killing for food, characters running away in search of food, ugly characters, dirty, ravaged, inhabiting ugly houses, dark and dirty. Such was the gallery of famished people that identified Cinema Novo with a miserabilism condemned by the government, by a critique that serves antinationalist interests, by the producers and by the public—the latter being incapable of facing the images of poverty (Rocha, transl. New York, Milan, Rio de Janeiro, January 1965).

The cinema committed to the aesthetics of hunger deeply opposed the easily digestible aesthetics of North American cinema that showed a perfect reality. Such is the framework of this aesthetic: to carry out a treatment of the particularities pertaining to the ‘hunger’ condition in which they could be recognized without paternalism or a certain “nostalgia for primitivism” (Rocha 1987). Indeed, dirty realism seems to embrace Rocha’s idea that reality has to be approached from a national and popular point of view, and portrayed through narratives about the marginalized, poor and exploited sectors of society. However, dirty realism’s update of these themes also portrays “the disenchantment of politics, the impossible redemption, the discredit of all collective destiny” (León, 33). The result is clear: low-budget films destined to crudely make visible the dark world of poverty and misery. Essentially, dirty realism cinema is conceptualized as “stripped of sociological discourses” and therefore able to articulate a form of visuality that does neither accept nor condemn violence (Ruffinelli, 2000: 20).

Materializing the belief that “fatality and absurdity are the only ways to represent the experience of violence” (Gaviria, 2002: 229), Victor Gaviria’s oeuvre include some of the

most celebrated and iconic pieces of this genre.²⁶ The crudeness and dirtiness present in some streets of Medellín are reflected in the hybrid and colloquial neorealist formalities of his films. Indeed, Gaviria himself has recognized the influence of both Vittorio de Sica and Roberto Rossellini's oeuvre. The exploration of the consequences of the war such as broken or hopeless characters, and social conflicts that remain forever unresolved, are some of the main neorealist aspects in Gaviria's film. However, a significant difference between Italian neorealist cinema and that of Gaviria is that the former reflects the optimism and hopefulness of the European post-war period, while the latter reveals the consequences of poverty that a large part of the Colombian society have endured throughout the duration of the internal conflict.

In both *Rodrigo D. No futuro* (Rodrigo D, No Future, 1990), and *La vendedora de rosas* (*The Rose Seller*) (1998), natural (non-professional) actors negotiate the social and personal affects between their lives and the events that will be considered part of the storyline. The protagonists of these films, and of most characters in Gaviria's films – such as *La vendedora de rosas* (*The Rose Seller*) (1998), *Sumas y restas* (2005) – are considered to be dysfunctional and politically abject²⁷ in face of the established liberal system. Therefore, they represent that which should be made invisible in order for society to progress.²⁸ The case of *Rodrigo D. No futuro*, which was inspired by Vittorio de Sica's *Umberto D* (1952) acts as a great example of Gaviria's known *leitmotiv* of presenting the 'paralysis' that neorealism explored; that is, a stagnation of reality, of both social and individual dynamics, whereby characters internalize such feeling of paralysis and wander aimlessly around the world. Certainly, Rodrigo's life experiences reflect the modern hardships of a youth that having lost its space in the world has nothing left to thrive for; nothing other than death.

Gaviria has called 'historical rage' to the discontent framed by these marginals who must assume a life devoid of opportunities and full of inequality. As a way of protesting against a tyrannical conservative society of the 80's, some of these young people assume a radical and marginal position by creating punk and metal music. The punk pioneers of Medellín, as portrayed in Rodrigo's character and friends, had a hard time getting equipment, and decided to assemble musical instruments with whatever they could get their hands on. Indeed, this is how punk, hardcore and ultra-metal emerge as an artistic representation and protest. The strident sounds of these rock sub-genres evidence that previous artistic expressions no longer provide any meaning to a generation that is torn between following the status quo of its environment and surviving, under their own codes, in a society that offers no possibilities for development. For them, it was evident that former languages of expression did not allow for a legitimate conversation between this marginalized periphery and the modern and capitalist logics that excludes them. In the words of the actor who plays Rodrigo, Ramiro Meneses: "Rodrigo D: No Futuro, is full of noise, noise, screams. This one has no

²⁶ Other examples of dirty realism films include: Barbet Schroeder's *La virgen de los sicarios* (2000), Adrián Caetano y Bruno Stagnaro's *Pizza, birra y faso* (1997), Sebastián Cordero's *Ratas, ratones y rateros* (1999), Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros* (2002), among others.

²⁷ Julia Kristeva coins the term 'abjection' to describe the is a process in which a person or community expels whatever threatens their individuality from the scope/condition of sense. When there is a suspension of law and normative, the abject emerges as "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules". According to the author, what is *abject* is not that which lacks sense, but rather that to which meaning is denied (1982: 4).

²⁸ In addition, León argues that they represent the shadow of political citizenship and a kind of unconscious of the rational subject of modernity (2015).

sound problems, it just captured the sound of that era; the noise generated by those characters who are like ghosts, who were already dead and only live in that movie”.

As these youngsters fall victim of the excluding logic of neoliberalism, the instability of their social and personal ties frees them from all moral and social normative. As a corollary, they are deprived of any reason to live. Conflict here is not clearly defined, but presented as the everyday life of those who as Rodrigo D, consider life to be death, and death to be freedom. As evidenced by a character in Rodrigo D who tells Johncito right after he was killed: "... at least you managed to leave, I pity those of us who are still here”, Gaviria’s youth is one without citizenship or future for whom rationality and progress are impossible. By portraying themes of corruption, orphanhood, death and alike, dirty realism films not only describe the fall of the modern citizen but also the incapability of individuals to gain awareness of their condition as oppressed and as agents of social revolution. In Gaviria’s words:

Neorealism is a ‘cinema of waiting’, as Umberto D. does, he waits. Rodrigo D is a tribute to Umberto D. Imagine how neorealists we were back then. At the time, we wanted to make a neorealist film of observation, of waiting, of the accompaniment of a character who is alone. The film walks with him during his distressing situation of not knowing how to solve his problems. (2002).

In effect, the youth in both *Rodrigo D*, and Gaviria’s oeuvre in general, have no one to ask for help. In both films, local authority barely exists, as there are only a few scenes in which there is some presence of police. Indeed, we are reminded that legal authorities and institutions are indifferent of marginal subjects, which are left to construct their own notions of justice, loyalty, legitimacy and truth. This lack of formal institutional order points to the fact that “the weakening of the very notion of belonging to society evidences a breakdown of the social bond and the awareness of the inability of the State to guarantee security” (Moroña, 2002: 14). Therefore, by exposing the existence of the communities that live outside State regulations, there emerge a doubt in regards to the universality of the established forms of institutionality, which not only excludes marginals from economic and social orders but also from epistemic, symbolic and cultural fields (León). Indeed, as Cervino y Cevallos remind us, the origins of different forms of violence, such as social, global, local and individual violence, can be traced back to a common ‘formal’ and excluding system (2003).

3.2. *Matar a Jesús (Killing Jesus) (2017), by Laura Mora.*

A community that does not acknowledge their government to be a reflexive agency cannot recognize any power to restlessness. *Matar a Jesús (Killing Jesus) (2017)* explores a permeating indignation of the contemporary Colombian society for whom, in face of the State’s abandonment, violence and fear are the daily bread. Director Laura Mora has publicly acknowledged the influence of Gaviria’s neorealism in her work. As in Gaviria’s films, Mora works with non-professional actors, inhabitants of marginalized neighborhoods of Medellín who have plenty of participation regarding the writing of the script.²⁹ *Matar a Jesús*, in particular, explores Gaviria’s atemporal and faithless youth under a hybrid structure that combines guerrilla documentary forms and the fictional narrative of a classic thriller.

²⁹ In an interview published by Revista Semana in March 2018, Laura Mora claims: "My biggest struggle, in terms of production, was to shoot it chronologically because these guys didn't have a script. We worked with them for three months to make them feel confident. They had a general idea of the story, but not the ending, because we wanted them to create for themselves the ethical dilemma posed in the film, the dilemma of being able to kill or not".

We are invited to follow Paula, a student of arts who after witnessing her father's murder infiltrates Medellín's underworld fueled by an initial will of vengeance and the urgent desire to find the truth behind her father's death. Paula holds a very tight relationship with her father who, in one of the first scenes of the film, laughs with her instead of scolding her after she jokingly recounts how she was caught with a small stash of marijuana in her bag. He laughs as if he were one of Paula's friends. After she finishes her short story, he asks Paula if she still smokes, to which she acknowledges to smoke just a little, when she feels stressed about life. Paula's father smiles and notes that the gravity of her preoccupations should be small, considering she is a young student. After this, he (very indirectly and smoothly) suggests that it would be a good thing if she stopped smoking altogether. In this way, Paula's father represents the ideal modern father. His career as a professor of law and an intellectual has provided him the tools to relate to his family (and build the familial bonds) in an open and understanding manner. By not using his patriarchal authority to force Paula to stop smoking, he presents her with the seemingly casual, yet constraining neoliberal 'freedom' in which the premise *it is your choice, but I am sure you will make the right decision* emotionally pressures the individual into performing specific actions so as not to disappoint their fatherly figure.

Seconds after this conversation Paula witnesses a man in a motorcycle shoot her father and drive away. The fact that he is portrayed earlier lecturing about Foucault suggests that his murder was of a political nature. As is usual in a large number of Colombian films, the flawed legal system is portrayed as a combination between poor funding and inept / corrupt law enforcing agents. In this case, investigators (who steal the father's watch) tell Paula and her brother that due to the high volume of crime the possibilities of finding who the killer is are zero to none and, in consequence, the only viable solution for them might be to simply move to a different city and carry on with their lives. In actuality, the exceptional cases where murderers – in murder cases such as the one portrayed in the film – are successfully identified become subjects of analysis and of literature. This is due to the fact that, unfortunately, in the majority of cases the killer remains unknown. A couple of days after local authorities dismiss Paula's traumatic experience, she recognizes the face of the man who shot her father dancing over the loud music and hypnotic, oneiric-like lights of an underground disco bar. Paula approaches him and get his number. His name is Jesús. Her plan is to set up a date with him on a later day so that she can find a way to buy a gun and get her revenge. After meeting him and getting to know him for a couple days she cannot bring herself to pull the trigger. Not because he is a sweet, innocent guy (which he is not) but because her engagement with him helps her witness and experience the disassociation between the social and moral structure of the marginal community in relation to the modern one.

Here, reality and filmic text intertwine continually. As a matter of fact, Mora's father was also killed after voicing his personal political convictions. She even admitted publicly that the idea for *Matar a Jesús* emerged right after she had a dream in which a man approached her and said: "I killed your father, my name is Jesús". Unlike Paula, Laura Mora did not see the face of the man who murdered her father, so in a way the film carries out her personal desire of finding the killer and the ultimate catharsis of getting an answer. In the film, it is not just the natural actors who include their personal testimonies in the filmic text; the painful biographical traces of Mora's personal trauma also explore the effects of scarred society in coping with a dysfunctional system. As pointed out by Beverley, cinema of marginality attempts to expose the irreducibility of subaltern culture through its testimonial effect (2004).

One of the most interesting aspects of the film, and what differentiates it from other dirty realism films – and Gaviria's oeuvre in particular – comes from the display of specific

genre tropes. The death of Paula's father detonates early in the film and quickly triggers a narrative of vengeance – characteristic of the thriller – whereby Paula, after suffering the loss of her progenitor (deprived of a patriarchal figure) and faced with the indifference of an incompetent State, seeks to acquire justice with her own hands.³⁰ In a sense, the genre inclusion in the film – which shapes Paula's character arch and narrative objectives –, represents the modern (colonial?) rhetoric being applied onto the dirty realist and marginal committed Latin-American cinema.

There is a moment in the film that perfectly captures this eventful communion. After spending some time near a lake with Jesús and his friends, Paula asks him to teach her how to shoot a gun. He jokingly points at her and tells her not to worry because “without hate, nothing happens, nothing comes out”. Later, Paula points to an invisible space in the horizon while Jesús holds her hands from behind and advises her: “Shoot in the head and with hate. If you don't feel hate, it does nothing. You have to do it with rage. You've been enraged before, or not?” After the shot is fired, Paula collapses and throws up.

The shakiness of the camera that follows Paula throughout the film, and in this scene in particular, coincides with the ad-lib actions of these spontaneous teenagers. After the camera, Jesús follows her and assures her that at times, the less you know, the longer you live. This particular scene functions as a parallel to a moment earlier in the film in which, after Paula tells Jesús about her interest in photography, he decides to take her to a beautiful place for her to take some photos. Jesús walks her up the small mountain overlooking Medellín that he visits from time to time when he wants to clear his mind and be on his own. After being asked about how her analog camera works, Paula describes the process: you focus and you shoot. Shortly after, she points the camera at Jesús who asks Paula not to take his picture as he loathes the idea of having photos *laying around*. Jesús' refusal of being photographed points not only to his fear of being on the other side of a shooting object, but also to his powerful rejection of being the subject of memory and history; of being remembered by having proof of his ephemeral existence. Paula's modern, objective-oriented life is incompatible with the timelessness, uselessness and disruption of Jesús' social anti-discourse.

The thriller narrative purpose of finding her dad's murderer progressively dials down as Paula becomes somewhat mesmerized during her immersion in this marginal world. In the fashion of a foreigner penetrating uncharted or virgin lands, Paula stops being a mere voyeur and progressively acquires a sixth sense for danger and violence: she starts learning the marginal ways. Here, it is worth noting that Paula seems to materialize Foucault's ideas about society that her father so greatly enjoyed lecturing about. Paula's restless and rebel character is initially highlighted as she is seen attending student gatherings and protests against the integration of new educational reforms that showcased large budget cuttings – which some students believed would result as prejudicial for the students as it would be for the professors.

The intrusion of Paula into the invisible underworlds of violence in Medellín takes the spectator by the hand. In fact, it is because Paula personifies the figure of the modern citizen that the spectator is granted access to this marginal community and faced with the ethical conundrums of blaming all the fears of a society in the blurry silhouette of the marginal. Unfortunately for Paula, Jesús turns out to be a teen just like her, only lonelier and more harmed by society's mechanisms of exclusion. Such moral conflict is emphasized when one

³⁰ Paula's retaliation narrative resembles the story of how so many 'self-defense' (*auto-defensas*) guerrilla groups emerged. Tormented by the FARC guerrillas, large numbers farmers throughout the countryside of Colombia conformed armed groups after they got fed up with (recognized) the incompetence and failure of the Colombian national army in protecting their communities and lands. Dramatic paralysis of the judicial system.

is forced to face the imperfect humanity of the victimizer. The problem lies in the fact that Jesús is not merely a villain but rather the personification of a broken system. Halfway through the film, we come to find out that Jesús' brother was also killed, and the reason he lives alone in a small dirty room away from his mother is in order to protect her from some "stupid things he has done in the past" that have him "by the neck". We also witness him protect Paula in several occasions. At the end of the day, Jesús lives at the mercy of everyday violence, only doing "anything they ask. I do what there is to do, what one has to do". At this point, it is no longer possible to demonize Jesús. His personification of a broken and failing system ultimately implies that he cannot be made responsible for perpetrating violence; and that blaming him would be useless, if not a complete waste of time.

It is important to note how Mora develops several Christian allegories. Near the end of the film, Jesús takes care and cleans Paula's wounds after she gets jumped by the person she was going to sell her camera and lenses to (in order to gather some money and buy the gun in order to kill Jesús). Ironically, Jesús takes her in his bike looking for the person to get Paula's things back with a gun. In that particular scene, atonement for sins, but also moral codes of this marginal youth, who will protect the people they feel connected to by feelings of loyalty, are made evident. In this way, the political start of the film progressively becomes ethical, as the modern systems of social bonding are juxtaposed to the gray peripheries of what constitutes the fractured moral structures of marginality. Jesús has been severely punished by life, and it seems that his only sin was simply to be born in the margins, across the borders of modernity. His lucid awareness of his situation is explored when Jesús, after being wounded in his stomach, hops in a taxi with Paula and while they drive away, he hopelessly asks her: "Please. Help me get out of this hellhole. From the moment I met you I knew you would save me." In Christianity, salvation refers to the "saving [of] human beings from sin and its consequences, which include death and separation from God" (Murray and Rea 2012). It is believed that Christ's death on the cross and following resurrection embodies the original sacrifice that atoned for the sin of humanity. According to Frank Stagg, one of the most noticeable silver linings in the Bible is that that humanity is in "serious trouble from which we need deliverance.... The fact of sin as the human predicament is implied in the mission of Christ, and it is explicitly affirmed in that connection." (1962: 12) The process of salvation, which "must offer redemption from bondage, forgiveness for guilt, reconciliation for estrangement, renewal for the marred image of God" (1962: 13), is interrupted when Jesús from Medellín cannot stand before Christ in judgement and complete his quest for heaven. He has faced enough difficulties in his journey but that is not enough for him to successfully reach eternal life. His destiny is not something he can act on or even change through good will and kind hearted actions. Rather, as in a pre-Christian paradigm, it is fatally imposed on him.

Catharsis comes at the last scene of the film. In it, Jesús stops by his mother's house before running away and Paula finally decides to confront him. She points a gun at him and violently begs him to confess the reason behind her father's killing. Jesús has no idea why they asked him to kill Paula's dad. His lines are as follows:

I don't know who killed him. They told me I had to kill him, and I did. Just kill me, I have 10 guys on my back trying to kill me, I rather you do it. Do you think I have a happy life? Finish it. We will never, ever know who killed your dad. It is what it is. We will never know, and we have to come to peace with it.

Paula does not shoot him. Jesús' life is spared but he is ultimately not saved from his condition. The modern ideal of finding the original sin, the primal cause of violence in order to overcome it, fails. At the margins, life does not follow a cause-and-effect structure of reason. If modernity is built in dialectics, the collapse of reason (founded in binary compositions such as inside/outside, center/periphery, etc.), also implies the fracture of the

modern society. Not shooting Jesús kills any possibility of a post-violence stage. If we follow a Christian framework, we can state that despite how much pain and trauma one goes through, God (or modernity) cannot save us. This leads to what Bustos (2002) identifies as an irruption of that 'elitist narrative of the nation' which, as was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, was a strong component in Latin-American New Cinema. Because violence is seen as an endemic, overwhelming condition instead of a traumatic event (one that can be defined), the post-conflict promise is not conceived as an objective or even as a possible solution. Against modernity's linear timelines of progression, peace is not understood as the chronological, successive state of violence in society. Violence is not something to overcome, but simply to suffer. The collective destiny of finding the core of violence (the primary wound or sin) in order to annihilate it, expires in *Matar a Jesús*. The narration of the death of Paula's father reflects on an individual's trauma of personal loss, but her encounter with marginality discloses the trauma and instability of a post-colonial Colombian society, and fuels the inability to verbalize (define) violence and to visualize its overcoming.

Víctor Gaviria continues his explanation in regards to the production of *Rodrigo D. No futuro*:

At the time, we wanted to make a neorealist film of observation, of waiting, of the accompaniment of a character who is alone. The film walks with him during his distressing situation of not knowing how to solve his problems. We wanted to make a cinema about those who do not have enough money to take the bus and do not know what to do next. However, when a solution to these problems is found through violence, (which Umberto D. never tried, he never tried to kill anyone), and is set in a current context, *neorealism faces a mutation that enters a kind of postmodernity*. (2002).

As in Gaviria's films, Mora believes it is of utmost importance to set aside (as much as possible) all subjectivity about the subject or the characters to be portrayed, as it is her intention as a filmmaker to show reality in an objective way. That is, stripped from personal judgments that could hinder the ultimate aim of serving as a legitimate voice of marginality that these films carry. In this way, "the suspension of the momentary personal judgment is necessary to understand the human space in which the characters unfold their lives" (29). Because of their commitment to the reality of the communities that articulate the narratives, Gaviria and Mora have been criticized for being too 'local'. Certainly, for the untrained ear of the average Spanish spectator (non-Colombian, that is), some of the dialogs and vocabulary – coupled with the very particular Medellín accent –, might be hard to understand. The conscious decision of not interfering with the domestic language of the non-professional actors, evidences the understanding of both filmmakers of the failure of communication that takes place when language reflects an ideology sustained in power hierarchies. The characters in these films occupy marginal places in history and try to place themselves in alternative positions to otherness through language. Due to the questioning of their place in society by means of their mode of speech, the actors in both *Matar a Jesús* and *Rodrigo D. No futuro* explore the use of language as a mechanism of resistance against hegemonic groups and institutions (Galeano 2016).

Following a search for objectivity, Laura Mora's *Matar a Jesús* makes use of a handheld camera that shakingly follows Paula's adventures, while giving the audience a sense of watching real life –almost as if spectators were themselves taking part in the scenes. While the film could entail the accelerated, full of tension rhythms of the 'infiltration thriller' format, director Laura Mora rejects these genre tropes and instead adopts festival-worthy formalities. Her take on neorealism implies a combination of an 'objective' and spontaneous presentation of reality with the cosmopolitan stylization of regional identities. On some

scenes, especially the ones where Paula seems to be more at-ease in Medellín's underground environment, time is elongated in dream-like sequences. By slowing down the images, and playing with oneiric lighting and blurred neon lights (especially in night scenes), Mora reveals the beauty and poetry that can lie underneath the brutal reality of the inhabitants of Medellín. Perhaps it is due to the visual display of such stylistic elements that the film received a large number of national and international awards which include the Audience Award for Best Colombian Film at the 2018 Cartagena Film Festival, the Roger Ebert Award for New Directors Competition at the 2017 Chicago Film Festival, the EROKSI Youth Award at the 2017 San Sebastián International Film Festival, among others.

In the end, *Matar a Jesús* develops a realism which reflects the persistent pessimism that a large part of the society feels regarding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Laura Mora's portrayal of the characters – even those who actively struggle for life and change – as an expendable generation that has no choice but to conform to the deadly cycle/dynamics of a reality destined to violence, leaves no space for hope or visualization of peace. The collapse of reason, performed in the film by the figure of the marginal youth, presents a social rupture so radical that even the progress and power structures of modernity cannot resolve. At the margins, there exist no primary event from which violence unfolds, and the indeterminacy of an original rational and historical conflict turns useless any attempt at rehabilitating the marginal into modernity. This irreconcilability is also made evident in the encounter between dirty realism and dominant genre specificities constituted by hegemonic modes of cinema, such as the Hollywood thriller format. In this regard, and through the linearity of the narrative structures and the instrumentality of specific characters and roles, genre also influences and shapes institutional conceptions of modern values such as progress, functionality and legitimacy. As we argued in the previous chapter, institutional 'post-conflict' cultural activity and production in Colombia has been largely crafted by neoliberal media strategies that mobilize under imperatives of 'modernizing' the nation. *Matar a Jesús* evidences the cultural *cul-de-sac* of attempting to re-formulate the Colombian marginal under modern or Eurocentric discourses.

4. WORLDLY INDIGENEITY

The social systems of indigenous peoples in Colombia are strongly associated to cosmogonic principles and forms of representation that are typical of mythology. For this reason, the cultural and religious knowledge produced by indigenous communities have for centuries been regarded as inherently abject to modern thought. In Colombia, native cultural rituals and modes of thinking were located at the margins of urbanity and modernity until the signing of the 1991 Constitution (one of the most progressive in Latin America) according to which, the State "(...) recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation" (Colombian Constitution, Article 7).³¹ After the rights of all ethnicities were acknowledged in the eyes to the law, official narratives and visualizations of indigenous peoples changed in order to reflect the State's disposition of integrating these communities into contemporary nation-building efforts. The issue regarding the representation of the indigenous in Colombia assumes great importance today, especially due to the fact that the signing of the peace treaty in 2016 advocates structural changes in the country's policies that strive to ensure the protection of minorities and the strengthening of democratic processes.

Dominant discourses of violence in regard to indigeneity in Colombia are structured around two main conjunctures, both directly founded in the colonial methodology that tends to subsume one culture to another, both politically and ideologically. In the first case, indigenous peoples are considered inferior to other ethnicities and social systems who will seek to appropriate native territory and eradicate / obliterate indigenous cultures. In Colombia, for instance, indigenous communities have had to endure not only the brutality of Spanish and British colonialist endeavors, but also the evangelizing missions carried out by the Colombian Catholic church with the purpose of pushing indigenous peoples into the path of God and away from damnation.³² In the second case, indigenous groups are still perceived as inferior yet some of their attributes are admired and considered exploitable or profitable. This colonial method of extraction of raw material includes the geopolitical exploitation of goods such as gold, minerals, crops and natural preservations, but also wider forms of symbolic exploitation. For example, it is usual to find weaving art products that mimic the art developed in certain indigenous communities in Colombia (such as the Emberá or the Wayúu peoples), promoted as 'made by natives' and sold at exorbitant prices.

In this second case, the savage yet magical (certainly pre-modern) indigenous Other becomes a meaningless or void concept that fascinates Western discourse. Such exotization has become even more popular in recent years as in globalization foreign societies and localities become focus of attention. It is precisely due symbolic forms of appropriation that Eurocentric intellectuals devote large amounts of resources into the scientific production of meaning and objects linked to indigenous cultures. Such colonizing vision, in its search and

³¹ In 1991, a new political constitution was promulgated in Colombia, within the framework of the peace talks between the State (successive governments of Belisario Betancur, Virgilio Barco and César Gaviria) and various guerrilla groups (M-19, EPL, Movimiento Indígena Quintín Lame And some others), which granted indigenous groups a series of new rights related in particular to education, the protection of *resguardos*, the jurisdiction of traditional authorities and the participation of Indigenous members in the political life of the country.

³² Republican origins of the disagreement between indigenous and elites date back to the early 19th century when the last Spanish garrison disappeared from the continent, but discrimination from the colony persisted. At the time, 1 in 3 Latin-American people spoke Spanish and it is estimated that there were 8 million indigenous people, 42% of the population based mostly in Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru.

production of meaning, is a great source of knowledge and scholarship.³³ The contemporary explorer colonizes and exploits peripheral forms of knowledge while rendering the results of the investigations into economic profit and cultural / ideological dominance. The exotization of indigenous cultural forms and values evidences a tendency to commodify tradition, while reinforcing a symbolic violence which, according to O’Byrne, is such “that underpin[s] representational practices themselves [... it] relates to both form and content, and alerts us as much to the risks of historical abstraction as to the ethical conundrums arising out of national efforts to produce a cultural politics of memory” (2008, 184). While imperial-colonial visualization/invisibilization of ethnicities is far from disappearing, it is certainly evolving slowly. In Colombia, the new symbolic capital that the 1991 Constitution attributed to indigenous peoples (Christian Gros, 2012) was further consolidated after the signing of the peace treaty. During this period, issues of human rights in Colombia gained prominence under the international spotlight. However, due to the “positive discrimination” that arose from it, today indigenous communities continue to face significant challenges such as the rearrangement of their political strategies and the articulation of discursive practices, including audiovisual representation. Indeed, cultural identity can be imposed or denied, but also suffered (Gros 2012).

The success of films that explore indigeneity in Colombia, such as Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra’s highly celebrated *Pájaros de verano* (*Birds of Passage*) (2018), seem to suggest a certain dynamic whereby indigenous peoples gain cultural focus as objects of spectacle and admiration; most likely in response to the State’s efforts to advertise a Colombian nationhood and to obliterate the millenary oppression that has affected and made invisible countless communities. Yet, as Pablo Mora reminds us, “the semiotic power that hegemonically monopolizes indigenous representations certainly pushes them out of their own symbolic universe. The work of anthropologists and of all State funded documentaries contribute to the indigenous figuration in the construction of national identities and, in this way, allow for the integration of these ethnic groups into the modern project of the Nation State [...]” (2015: 32). Recently, cultural, political, discursive and technological changes (including the relativistic turn of anthropology and the criticism of colonialism) have refashioned the slogan of “giving a voice to those who do not have it”, and popularized media strategies that promote diversity and marginality – at times, as a perfect autochthonous commodity for international cultural circuits.

We now turn to the analysis of *Pájaros de Verano* – one of the most acclaimed national films about indigenous communities in Colombia – in order to highlight some of the mechanisms through which ethnicity is located within the issue of violence in popular and transnational arenas. Indeed, I decided to use Gallego and Guerra’s art film piece as the case study for this last chapter precisely to evidence that global art cinema articulates marginality through specific mechanisms that transgress the autochthonous and situates it on the global scale. Its treatment of marginality elucidates on populist tendencies of representation that dirty realism avoids in favor of remaining legitimate to the marginal narratives it develops. In this case, indigeneity – perceived as a form of marginality – will be analyzed as it is explored in Colombian cinema, a cinema already peripheral to mainstream/dominant film production in the region.³⁴ Indeed, as the work of Ciro Guerra will evidence, it will be thanks to art

³³ Edward Said (1978) argues that Orientalism has been subjected to “imperialism, positivism, utopianism, historicism, Darwinism, racism, Freudianism, Marxism, Spenglerism. But Orientalism, like many of the natural and social sciences, has had “paradigms” of research, its own learned societies, its own Establishment.” (43).

³⁴ Dominant production in the region as led by “the big three” countries, that is, Argentina, Mexico and Brazil (Falicov and Middents 2012: 115).

cinema that the gap between Colombian peripheral film industry and successful presence in international festivals will be bridged.

4.1. Local bird flies globally: *Pájaros de Verano* (Birds of Pasage) (Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra, 2018).

Nothing to do with communism, Peter. Long live capitalism, *no joda!*

-Moisés after encountering a North-American tourist distributing ‘Say no to communism’ pamphlets.

Presently, Ciro Guerra is one of (if not the most) recognized Colombian filmmakers. His work has been highly acknowledged internationally, as the narrative themes he explores in his films –mainly colonialism, indigeneity and the clash between different cultures upon contact – have gained wide visibility in art circuits around the globe. Indeed, his films, which usually explore rural margins of the country and their excluded communities, seem to have found a comfortable spot in international film festivals (Cannes, in particular) and their present fascination with various forms of diversity. As a highly acclaimed art cinema artist with stylistic proficiency, Ciro Guerra has placed Colombian cinema into European and North American mainstream arenas. *Pájaros de Verano* (Birds of Pasage) (Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra, 2018), continues exploring the cultural concerns he has channeled throughout his career. In this production, co-directed with his wife Cristina Gallego, the filmmakers propose a review of the origins of drug trafficking – from a poetic perspective. The storyline of *Pájaros de verano*, presented as the oral narration of an unknown elder man,³⁵ is composed of a 5-chant epic poem – typical of Wayúu storytelling –and explores the downfall of the Pushaina clan by the irruption of non-native cultural systems into the community. The chants ("*Hierba salvaje 1968*", "*Las tumbas 1971*", "*La bonanza 1979*", "*La guerra 1980*" y "*El limbo*"), narrate the dramatic structure while echoing the five intense acts of a Shakespearean drama.

La Guajira’s favorable geographical position, combined with the Colombian government’s neglect of large parts of its territory, resulted in the boom of the country's drug trafficking problem that brought enormous amounts of money to the region between the 60s and 80s.³⁶ After the Colombian and US governments campaigned for the shutting down of illegal business, the Wayúu clans that inhabit La Guajira returned to a challenging poverty (even worse than the one they suffered before the boom), not only economically but also spiritually. The communities had a hard time going back to their practices and traditions after experiencing so much cultural destruction and death. This precise cultural collapse caused by the abrupt arrival of capitalism in the territory of the Wayúu community is at the center of

³⁵ The only time we will see this character is by the end of the film. This elder man is a survivor of the war between the Wayúu communities, and his purpose is to reinforce the importance of remembering and valuing the traditional habits of the indigenous peoples in Colombia, in particular, oral forms of cultural transmission. On a different note, he is also blind, somehow pointing to Homer, who was also blind. This character clearly develops the conception of the storyline as Greek-style tragedy where the inevitability of fate is elemental.

³⁶ Before Colombia became a leader in the drug trafficking scene, Mexico provided the US with marihuana; but by then, in association with the US, Mexico was eradicating its marihuana crops, mainly under the influence of the Nixon government.

Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra's *Pájaros de verano (Birds of Passage)* (2018). The film states its purpose right from the start. A foreword reads: "This story is inspired in real events that took place in La Guajira region (northern extreme of Colombia) between the decades of 1960 and 1980." This historical period is referred to as the *Bonanza Marimbera*, a surge of marihuana trafficking that opened the channels to the exportation of drugs into the US, partly due to the high demand from the traumatized soldiers of Vietnam (Britto, 2016).

The film begins with a scene that almost seems to portray an ethnographic documentation of the *yonna* ritual (also known as *chichamaya*). Wrapped in a red cloth, we see a young girl, Zaida, open her arms and dance in front of the whole community. This Wayúu fertility ritual represents the formal presentation of a girl's maturity in society – and therefore, of her availability as a future wife. In this dance, the girl's movements resemble those seen in a bullring: the woman, wrapped in the red blanket, chases the man and attempts to knock him down, following the changes of direction guided by the rhythm of the *kasha* (tribal drums). During this scene, Rapayet, a young man, dances with Zaida and right after performing the *yonna* he whispers in her ear: "you will be my wife". However, Rapayet is considered an *alijuna* (term with which the Wayúu previously designated the Spanish conquerors, and currently refers to the "non-indigenous") and holds no high status in the community that would grant him the possibility of marrying Zaida and joining the Pushaina family – one of the most respected and honorable in the Wayúu community. In fact, it is only because his honorable uncle *palabrero* intercedes on his behalf that Úrsula, Zaida's mother, agrees to take him into account.

Úrsula, the spiritual guide of the Pushaina clan, the *ouutsü*, communicates with dreams and the otherworld in order to protect the family, as the society of this specific indigenous group is matrilineal in nature. Since the dreams warn her against *alijunas*, she only considers Rapayet in relation to his uncle – and with one condition: he must be able to pay an exorbitant dowry for Zaida's hand. Let us quickly note that the Wayúu social structure is based on honor and the members' *word*, the *palabrero*, also known as *Putchipü*, is one of the most important and respectable figures of the society. Such foundational basis – of respecting what is said – has allowed them to survive for centuries as a culture of dialogue; so much so that their oral tradition is considered a patrimony of humanity (UNESCO 2010).

Úrsula's costly request combined with Rapayet's need for money inaugurate the film's first chant: *Hierba salvaje*, 1968 (Savage Weed). In this first chant, we witness the first glimpses of the intrusion of capitalism into the community. Rapayet encounters a group of North American members of the Peace Corps³⁷ who are looking to buy marihuana, and agrees to make business with them. Desperate to get the money and afford Zaina as a wife, he asks his cousin Anibal to switch his coffee crops into marihuana plantations, which pay 5 times better. Anibal is reluctant because Rapayet's business partner and friend, Moisés, is an *alijuna*. However, due to the fact that Rapayet is his cousin, he agrees to help him out and both parties quickly start making large amounts of money. Soon, Rapayet is able to afford the dowry and marry Zaida. The legitimacy of money as primary resource of progress and as the

³⁷ The group of North Americans are here seen distributing "Say No to Communism" brochures. The Peace Corps strategy, created by President Kennedy to stop communism back in 1961, had the purpose of educating local communities about agricultural development, pedagogy, health and architectural building. The Baby Boom generation, born just after the Second World War, begin to criticize and rethink the American way of life: the American dream. They criticize those imperialist adventures of the United States in Vietnam. The consumption of marijuana is adopted by the bohemian classes, precisely to accentuate that criticism of society. When the counterculture arises (*hippism*) marihuana becomes the symbol of that rebellion.

most convenient way to achieve an individual's (the neoliberal individual) goal is inaugurated in this transaction, and further evidenced in a scene in which Moisés, after seeing the amount of money white people are willing to pay for marihuana, tells Rapayet: "Weed is the world's happiness!" To which his friend replies: "more like, *their* happiness".³⁸ Evidently, in the case of the Pushaina clan, there is no need to seek grand economic wealth, other than a stability that allows them to live a healthy and fulfilling life. Honor, not money, is the ultimate symbol of status and/or superiority for the Wayúu community. The downfall of the Pushaina clan emerges precisely from the adoption of trafficking as a mode of modernization and progress. In addition, the breaking of social hierarchies – by way of the control of large flows of money – introduces a spirit of anarchic freedom, and brings pleasure in the acts of spending and wasting.

The second chant: *Las tumbas*, 1972 (The Tombs), explores the difficulties that arise during the clan's attempt at balancing both their honor and greed. The adverse encounter between capitalism and the Wayúu's socio-economic system evidence the incompatibility of these very different cosmovisions. Soon enough, money and weapons (instead of honor or the spoken word) become the mediators of the social cohesion of the clan. The importance that the Wayúu people attribute to orality is expressed early on by one of the characters in the film who claims that as a community they have "defended themselves against the claims of the English, Spanish and local governments" solely through the use of the word. Therefore, the rupture of the social bond is caused by the rejection and undermining of the oral contract, one of the fundamental principles of the Wayúu peoples. This is made clear in a scene in which Moisés, after finding out that the North Americans are also buying weed from other providers, gets angry and shoots them (he also kills Aníbal's friend, when the friend tries to stop Moisés; which will cause irreparable tension between the families). After Rapayet confronts him, arguing that the whole situation could have been solved by talking, Moisés explains the reasoning behind his actions: "Talking? Then send a *palabrero* to the U.S.; Don't you want to keep both the money and the weed?" Eventually, Moisés' debauchery and perversion will be central to the degeneration of the Pushaina clan and the rupture of their family bonds.³⁹ The progression of the capitalist dynamics of labor and profit in this section of the film highlights the informal character of land issues caused by the Colombian State's negligence in rural territories. Let us remember that the title of the previous chapter, *Hierba salvaje*, already implies a savage object that is available for domestication by an external agent. While Moisés is not white (US American), nor part of the clan (indigenous), his actions affect the Pushaina family insofar as it now includes Rapayet as a member, whom Úrsula accuses of hanging too much around *alijunas* and thus of forgetting the clan's habits.

The depths of the corruption of the Pushaina clan by the *alijuna* cosmovision is the focus of the third chant: *La bonanza*, (*The Bonanza*) 1979. Here, the inclusion of the new generation into the affairs of the clan will be marked by a straightforward repulsion to all forms of tradition. Leonidas, Zaida's younger brother, is seen earlier in the film being violent, humiliating, arrogant and disrespectful towards anyone he chooses, including the daughter of Aníbal, an action that enrages this last one. In effect Leonidas' action is taken by Aníbal as an

³⁸ It is interesting to note that the title of the film – *Birds of Passage* - has a double meaning. On the one hand, it evokes the various species of birds that form the myths of the native Wayúu. On the other, it is reminiscent of the aircrafts that began to land in the area to receive marijuana deliveries that would later be sent to the United States.

³⁹ Moisés brings greed, arrogance and the validation of the idea of resolving problems through armed means into a fairly quiet community that organizes all matters regarding its members around dialog and also introduces a system that is a small-scale version of what later in history will become the Colombian drug trafficking systems of the 1980's.

insult, and for damage to be repaired he gives Leonidas two choices: either apologize to her or do manual labor in Aníbal's ranch. Now, up to this point, Leonidas' assertion that he'd rather learn how to *ride* a plane instead of a horse corroborates his lack of interest in tradition which leads him to violate all Wayúu rules of conduct and social behavior. It comes as no surprise then that Leonidas refuses to apologize to Aníbal's daughter.⁴⁰ His rebellious attitude is not fully controlled by Úrsula as, by virtue of being her son, he is 'the man of the clan'.⁴¹ This position grants him freedom to act as he likes and, as he grows older, he starts abusing this behavioral autonomy up to the point where he rapes Aníbal's daughter. Úrsula, knowing well that Aníbal will try to kill Leonidas, hides him and performs rituals of protection, to which he responds that a group of men would help more than some "stupid, useless ritual". To modern vices and capitalist socio-economic dynamics, there also emerges a patriarch modality that negates female intuition and tradition.

4.2. Dreaming of the end.

It is worth noting here that dreams are a fundamental aspect of the Wayúu tradition, since they are believed to explain the reality of both the individual person and the group, and are also conferred prophetic powers. The clan's matriarchy depends precisely on Úrsula's ability to communicate with dreams, as this allows her to protect her clan. However, after she voices concerns in relation to some dreams she had, Zaida, Leonidas and other members of the family – specifically the younger generation – deny importance to Úrsula's intuitive powers claiming that "the older she gets, the more superstitious". Clearly, Úrsula's matriarchy is no longer recognized by the male or young members of the clan.⁴² Female intuition and the value of the oral tradition are no longer valid means of social agreement. By this point, the clan has morally declined so terribly that dreams stopped communicating with Úrsula. As a consequence, the family is left without (spirit) protection. This chant, in addition to being the most violent one, portrays the irremediability of corruption and the terminating "loss of soul" of the Pushaina family.

The fourth chant: *La Guerra*, 1980 (The War) contemplates the desperate attempts of the family to save themselves. Úrsula takes Zaida and her grandchildren away from Rapayet, who offers every possession in his family to Anibal as an attempt to calm things down. However, by this point things are too convoluted, and even the *palabrero* has been killed. Before being shot, he stands before Anibal (who is holding a gun) and reminds him, "if you kill the *word*, you kill the most sacred Wayúu law".⁴³ But there is no longer an integral

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that he refuses speech and, by doing so, he acknowledges the importance of word and orality. Leonidas has never been as Wayúu as in this moment, and never again will he reflect any other native belief.

⁴¹ Gallego notes a conflictive element: First of all, they constitute a matrilineal society, to say that it is a place where women are supremely strong, handling leadership roles both in politics and economics and with dreams. The role of women is to work in the world of the border, and that makes them very powerful. But, at the same time, it is a deeply *macho* society. It has a very large representation, but not dominant.

⁴² Even her daughter disregards some of Úrsula's practices. In one scene, Úrsula is explaining the narrative behind the weaving of the Wayúu bags to her granddaughter. However, Zaida dismisses the practice and asks Úrsula to leave it for another day, even after this last one claims it is important for Indira to learn about Wayúu weaving.

⁴³ After the *palabrero's* death, the *palabrero* family and council visit Úrsula and conduct a trial in order to figure out the situation and the *palabrero's* honor. Some defend him, highlighting his honor. Others, condemn him of letting Úrsula profaning the word, hide guns

Wayúu unity to protect and misfortune is inevitable. The breaking of traditions and of cultural identity is what dissolves the social tissue and causes the consequent death of the family. Indeed, by Chant five: *El limbo*, (*The Limbo*) most members of the clan are killed, with the exception of Úrsula, Leonidas – who is still in hiding – and Zaida’s daughter Indira, to whom Úrsula gives a bag full of money and forces to run away. This last chapter ends tragically, and the death of the clan somehow seems to mirror the little pieces of information we are given about Rapayet’s fatal family history; pointing the way to a certain circularity-inevitability of faith. Such a structure of rise-peak-downfall portrays the Pushaina clan as a family condemned to live marginalized from their own culture and wonder aimlessly through the arid and magical lands of La Guajira.

The intrusion of a capitalist system, as portrayed in *Pájaros de verano*, could be described using a metaphor of a body that rejects an organ transplant and eventually dies because of incompatibility. In this sense, we can draw similarities to Guerra’s earlier film, *El abrazo de la serpiente* (2015) (*Embrace of the Serpent*), insofar as both films focus on the dissolution of indigenous communities caused by the arrival of white man’s capitalism and whose histories lack a written record (Russell, 2021). In both cases, and in Guerra’s filmography in general, the “margins become spaces of global legitimisation for Colombian cinema” (Luna, Meers, 2017: 126).

Moreover, in films by Guerra, native peoples are not depicted as pure and innocent "noble savages" that are suddenly confronted with unknown powerful forces. Rather, the communities are portrayed already within their local ambiguities, slowly becoming entangled in problematics that arise after the appearance drug trafficking, as a way to realize that "kind of collective dream that appears repeatedly in the stories of different media" (Arias Herrera, 2010, p. 139). At this point, it is possible to distinguish the traits and virtues that link the stereotype of the drug trafficker and the merchant: courage, ambition, intelligence, agility (Tobón, 2020). Indeed, the figure of the drug trafficker implies a narrative in which an entrepreneur works his way to the top, “an individual who rises above his humble condition by his own effort and he becomes rich and powerful” (Palaversich, 2015: 210). Perhaps it should be added that this economic justification engages with the discourse of capitalist entrepreneurship and with a vague promise of anti-imperialist revenge (Tobón). Indeed, *Pájaros de Verano* does not only depict an indigenous Other, but rather, a non-capitalist Other.

As traditional indigenous knowledge becomes less and less legitimate, capitalist reasoning takes over. The result is the narrative union between the origins of drug trafficking and García Márquez’ oneiric dimension of magical realism – characterized by intuition, matriarchy, supernatural realms and dreams. Indeed, most of the scenes of the film take place in outdoors, within vast desert spaces that give the impression of infinity, and suggests a spectral presence. In this regard, Gallego notes that:

We noticed that Wayuú codes brought us closer to the tradition of those Italian families that we see in gangster movies. As we began to do more research, we realized that the world of Gabriel García Márquez is directly related to the Wayuú tradition and way of life: the world of intuition, of matriarchies, of the dead and the supernatural. So, we take a very strong element such as *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) and the history of that family. Without premeditation, we ended up going that way. Magical realism has always been a very difficult universe to

and money in tombs, and of not acting like a Wayúu member but as an *alijuna*. Finally, she is asked to return the family talisman.

portray in cinema, I suppose because of its closeness to literature. We simply decided to follow the guidelines of the traditional Wayú world (2019).

The tension between magical realism and plain realism (also implied in genre conventions and promoted by the film's purposes of remaking historical events) articulates the violent transgression of modernity into the borders of tradition. Furthermore, Guerra himself argues that "genre cinema, as a territory known to the viewer, served us as a kind of vehicle to take the spectator into an unknown world, with the codes of the genre acting as a guide" (2019). After the initial descriptive portrait of a typical Wayú clan, the narrative focus shifts in order to explore the tensions that emerge from the cultural confrontation. The call for universal identification sought by Guerra will become more noticeable as the scenes – at first worthy of ethnographic documentary in its observation of tribal rituals— start slowly relying more and more on film *noir* conventions seasoned to the peculiarities of the tropics.⁴⁴ As it was the case with *Matar a Jesús*, genre is developed and altered with the firm intention of reverberating the social tensions explored in the films. However, in contrast to Mora's film, *Pájaros de verano*, gives way to an entertainment formula that sublimates the wonders of ethnic tradition, cosmic logic and ancient beliefs in order to present the portrait of a lost innocence (a place of infancy); one highly celebrated in international festivals.

The films' use of dominant means of filmmaking (both aesthetical and of market value) to achieve universal identification ("known territory" for the spectator as according to Guerra) plays on affectivity by exalting the moral aspects of the community's exotic tradition and virtues. In this Western circuit of affectivity (which Guerra assimilates as universal), the film seems to fall prey to the fetishization of the community's conception of 'honor' and the value of the oral tradition. It is no secret that the international viewer that Guerra talks about is one fascinated by indigenous tales of admirable virtuousness that transcend reality. By combining indigenous ethnographic exotism with the film's intention of portraying the origins of drug trafficking in Colombia, Gallego and Guerra think locally but act globally.⁴⁵ The directors follow a certain modern and cosmopolitan worry about the rural-Other that characterize them as pilgrims in their own country. The application of this *glocal* perspective provides the certainty of box-office success abroad, and a sort of international 'quality seal' that assures the film's favorable recognition in Colombia.⁴⁶ This dynamic implies that the representation of indigenous groups is negotiated in international discourses of ethnicity, and only after the film returns triumphant from international film festivals to the country, these images are accepted and integrated into the national imaginary. This flow of physical and symbolic goods establishes a system in which the continuous articulation of some identities, and the deconstruction of others, ultimately exceeds the idea of what is national and local.

When analyzing the success of the *Pájaros de Verano*, one cannot help but conclude that its adoption of dominant discursive strategies is not only a narrative resource, but fundamental to the directors' linear ideas of progress and history. Indeed, the description of the 'original sin' that caused one of the most significant causes of structural inequality in the

⁴⁴ All this begins to fade from the arrival of the new world. Gallego adds that "the conceptual is not only visual but also sound, a kind of naturalistic expressionism, an expression that refers to the relationship they have with the elements of nature. We are talking about a transformation, from a passage from one era to another, from a sunny moment to rain, from vivid colors to blues, from a time of brilliance and splendor to another of storm. The concept of seasonality is important" (2019).

⁴⁵ In reference to the slogan of progressive NGOs that Sony would take over in the early nineties (Sinclair, 2000, Robertson, 1995)

⁴⁶ In fact, in 2018 it reached fourth place for Colombian films, with 266,268 viewers, and returned to theaters the following year thanks to its shortlist for the 2019 Oscars.

country, and further ‘kicking out of heaven’ implies a linear and unidimensional account of history. One that acknowledges an extreme confidence on rationality and the rationalization of any type of experience, even those that are spatial and multidimensional. By blaming the imposition of capitalist systems of value for originating the decadence and destruction of culture, the narrative remains attached to Eurocentric discourses of colonialism (which it turns against itself). Capitalist settlement, described as the specific point in history from which further rural violence emerges, clearly responds to linear structures of reason; which is characterized by the analytical, chronological, and sequential production of meaning.

Ultimately, both Gallego and Guerra have done a great job in researching about the community’s culture and, due to their mastery of filmic elements, have managed to integrate it beautifully into the structure of the narrative. However, Wayúu culture seems to be more benefit of the festival than of their own nation. The processes that weave indigenous subjects into the official narratives present a tendency to expel and marginalize the communities that produced these subjects, insofar as they are fetishized as an autochthonous commodity and/or used as an example of the successful efforts of nation-building projects. Let us not forget that the Colombian government’s funding of film production that benefited Gallego and Guerra’s work, follows the State’s neoliberal attempts of marketing the Colombian nation as a multicultural, inclusive and industrialized country.

Moreover, there is a prominent neoliberal logic in which minoritarian and marginalized communities are attributed no value, other than their availability for extraction of resources. Indeed, an important aspect of the conflict between indigenous traditions and modernity is linked to the invasion of indigenous territories by networks of traffickers whose activities destabilize the traditional ways of life of indigenous people in multiple ways.⁴⁷ *Pájaros de Verano* portrays the Pushaina clan as a family progressively domesticated and consumed by capitalist dynamics of imperial extraction of restricted or prohibited resources. The erotization and rape carried out by Leonidas, for example, reflects a colonial understanding of the female body as a place available for conquest. Just as the Pushaina clan, Gallego and Guerra strategize the usage of colonizer’s tools by exoticizing the Wayúu symbolic imaginary. The Pushaina clan perished. Gallego and Guerra, however, come out gracefully and unscathed from the process of introducing modern structures of thought and representation, precisely because they locate themselves and the issue of violence – not at the margins but – right at the center of the current post-conflict agenda of the Colombian State and the shifting of the international attention towards it.

In effect, formally speaking, *Pájaros de Verano* is directly tied to transnational and global art needs. The film provides a perspective on the long-lasting narratives that blame cultural collapse to colonial encounter and domination in order to promote the fetishization of local themes and the appropriation of marginality for industrial benefit/surplus⁴⁸. The convergence between marginality as a space for discard and marginality as a cultural and (therefore) economic goldmine evidences the ways in which cultural determinations are not merely represented in narratives but articulated and sustained in them.

⁴⁷ Similarly, some authors suggest that the levels of violence and social conflict are a consequence of the negative impact of the values of neoliberalism in society (Reiner 2007).

⁴⁸ Marginality here turns financially profitable, post-conflict is fetishized as are the colonialist dynamics now treated as fashionable themes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout these pages, we have located our analyses at the intersection between media, human rights and geopolitics, in order to explore the dichotomies that articulate notions of identity and from which the Colombian society visualizes itself in the current post-conflict context. While the stylistic and aesthetic proficiency of the films are to be attributed to the filmmakers, on the larger picture, we can acknowledge the pieces to be more a product of their time than that of their authors (Campo, 2016). The films discussed throughout the previous chapters mediate conflict, and despite all their formal / textual differences, they all sustain the images of violence in Colombia by pointing to the same critical junctures that articulate the social bond and, at the same time, its annihilation. These conjunctions, which are manifested in the popular imaginary, contribute to the ethical and political formations of society. That is to say, they conform the visualities of conflict and, in doing so, shape the related social values of the collective imaginary.

From the textual film analyses effected in the previous chapters we are able to conclude that violence is present as an indeterminate force that filters through the images, a force that does not determine the development of events or the behavior of the characters, but that nevertheless affects both. Narrative aspects such as the settings, thematic emphases, characters, intention of the narrator, and viewer reaction to the film, evidence that conflict, as articulated in these popular films, is understood as a permanent state of chaos that characterizes ‘normality’ and from which there is no possible end or redemption. The narrative tendency of portraying movement and passage to unknown, marginal territories (mostly represented in rurality and or marginality) is therefore one of fatalism and hopelessness. As argued by María Luna: “the poetic construction of a Colombian cinema that revolves around the local, together with the growing nostalgia of the West for a return to rurality, locate the coordinates of the production of the recent Colombian cinema, as cosmopolitan in its production and distribution, as it is rural in its themes.” (2013: 70) Let us remember that during the 19th century, the failure of agrarian reforms throughout the continent implied a massive migration from the countryside to the city. It only took a few decades for the Latin American societies to shift from being around 70% rural to being 70% urban. This movement created margins of misery around the big cities. The failure of the land reforms deteriorated living conditions in the countryside, expelled millions of communities from their territories, and reinforced informal economies and social structures. While rurality disappeared from mass media during the 80’s due to the surge of narco-related narratives,⁴⁹ the return to rural and marginal themes responds to disenchantment and disappointment / skepticism towards processes of modernity and rationality as redeeming forces of post-conflict and engines of progress. To such geopolitical context, the peace process as a mediatic event is juxtaposed. Indeed, the 3 films are pessimistic (reflect little hope) regarding any possible solution to conflict.

By privileging the associative aspects of the system of narrations – instead of focusing on the truthfulness of the events narrated (how accurately they are testimonies of ‘real’ events) – we were able to disclose the functionality of cinema as a cultural system. In doing so, we give special attention to the ways in which the films relate to the systems that define

⁴⁹ In this type of narratives, the protagonist is typically a marginal character who lives in the large urban centers of Colombia, and who depicts the figure of the hitman. This character tends to reflect notions of backwardness, poverty, unemployment, the absence of State action, but also of hedonism, consumption, the culture of the image, drug addiction. In other words, it is a character which illustrates the colonization of the world of life by modernity (Giraldo y López 261).

morality, governmentality and through which citizens recognize themselves as part of the community. Indeed, it is interesting to note how the examination of these aspects developed in the films evidenced that the discourse of the colonial encounter is still one of the most defining tangents in the articulation of marginality and, therefore, the representation of identity. More precisely, the themes of travel, journey, home, urbanity/rurality and exploration in the Colombian context are strictly articulated around themes of uprooting, disintegration of social bonds, loss and/or pain. In *Alma de Héroe*, for instance, the ‘heroes of the Nation’ penetrate the deep and dark corners of the Colombian jungles – from which the source of violence is to be found – in order to identify and annihilate it; yet they find more suffering than initially expected. In *Matar a Jesús*, Paula takes the cosmopolitan viewer to the margins of modern notions of progress, and into the *cul-de-sac* that Eurocentric ideals of rationality have to offer to marginal youths; encountering (instead of revindication) nothing but impotency in front of cultural stagnation. Finally, in *Pájaros de Verano*, the traumatic introduction of capitalism and neoliberalist social formations are found guilty of expelling traditional knowledge and other social processes from the collective identity of indigenous communities. In each case, the encounter is traumatic and fatal.

Regarding the representation of those affected by the dynamics of violence, marginality is most easily counterposed against official / governmental missions of promoting grand narratives regarding post-conflict. The high degree of international attention focused on human rights processes in Colombia is manifested in the incessant efforts of the State in promoting new cultural identities that cannot fully represent social reality and marginality. Those affected (rejected, undefined) social groups cannot identify with the new identities and are therefore doomed to remain suspended between the Colombian government’s neoliberalist efforts and the fragility of the social bonds that articulate them. The unnegotiable representation of State figures and of history in *Alma de héroe* responds not only to the impossibility of tolerating ambivalence, but to the unwillingness of including perspectives that fall outside of institutional structures and discourses of violence; These last ones, considered imperative in post-conflict social articulation and regeneration. For instance, in *Matar a Jesús*, unlike *Alma de héroe*, the perpetrators of violence – who were almost always central in the cinema about violence and in many cases still are – here become indistinguishable. Not having a clear enemy to antagonize is also problematic and, in many ways, much more traumatic.

Moreover, it is believed that the privileged mode of visualizing victims of violence and marginal groups – a Manichean fictionalization of the armed conflict that results in a narrative of martyrs and heroes – would help reduce complexity of violence and facilitate the articulation of a national post-conflict identity. Adversely, these types of narratives neglect structural violence as a social phenomenon. In effect, the definition of conflict as envisioned in the testimonies of official or governmental institutions proves just how ineffectual these are when the discourses that legitimize social categories are proved unstable by the marginal groups themselves who contend to governmental ineptitude. Certainly, the presence of official authority in both *Matar a Jesús* and *Pájaros de Verano* is replaced by even more strict self-regulatory configurations set in place by the communities, themselves excluded from official discourses of social conduct. The uselessness of institutional visualizations of conflict in efforts of nation-building and identity articulation is evidenced in all of the 3 films discussed in this paper, and curiously enough, even more so in *Alma de héroe*. Dislocation and further movement (of meaning) is violent in itself. Here again, the violence of representation, while purposeless, is impenetrable and irredeemable - and State neglect remains as something that viewers can definitely relate to.

The interplay between fiction, testimony, witness and experience sustains the myth of nation and the conceptions of collective identity. The disarticulation of classical structures of

cinema noir, art cinema and thriller narratives, comes from the integration and combination of different characteristics pertaining to documentary and ethnographic forms of cinemas. Through the tensions between genre tropes, the three films produce a certain effect of legitimacy. Indeed, the interplay between documentary and fiction is present throughout the works and while they remain under the category of fictional works, they are completely contingent to the social environment they develop and maintain. The testimonial aspect of narrations, especially of those fictional, prove to be integral in the representation of conflict not only because it actively juxtaposes personal and communitarian experiences on the social imaginary, but also because it admits a condition of spectacularism to regulate the collective visibility and topographies of violence. Certainly, this shines light on the fact that specific genre structures and formal characteristics (conflictual themselves) can be said to influence and reinforce social conditions (Thwaites et al. 1994, 100). However, the application / treatment of genre conventions in the films studied were found to reflect the tensions and frailty of social bonds, which ultimately point to the disintegration of the collective notions (and constructions) of identity.

The idea is clear: in order to constitute themselves, “every nation must construct a past for itself” (Lambek, M., Antze, P., 2016:24), it must construct a collective memory. Communities, then, “are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 1991:6). In telling a story about a nation’s violent past, the question of whether a traumatic event really happened and its historical accuracy is no longer of major relevance. Rather, the importance is placed on understanding how that particular event is narrated and interpreted by the collective; that is, the stories they tell themselves in order to alleviate their distressed histories. It is thus pertinent to conclude that the popular narratives through which a large part of the Colombian society make sense of violence converge in the fracture of identity and, therefore, its indefinability. It is, then, precisely, in the rupture and marginalizing of the social bond and meaning that notions of community are articulated (and annihilated) in the context of post-conflict.

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